ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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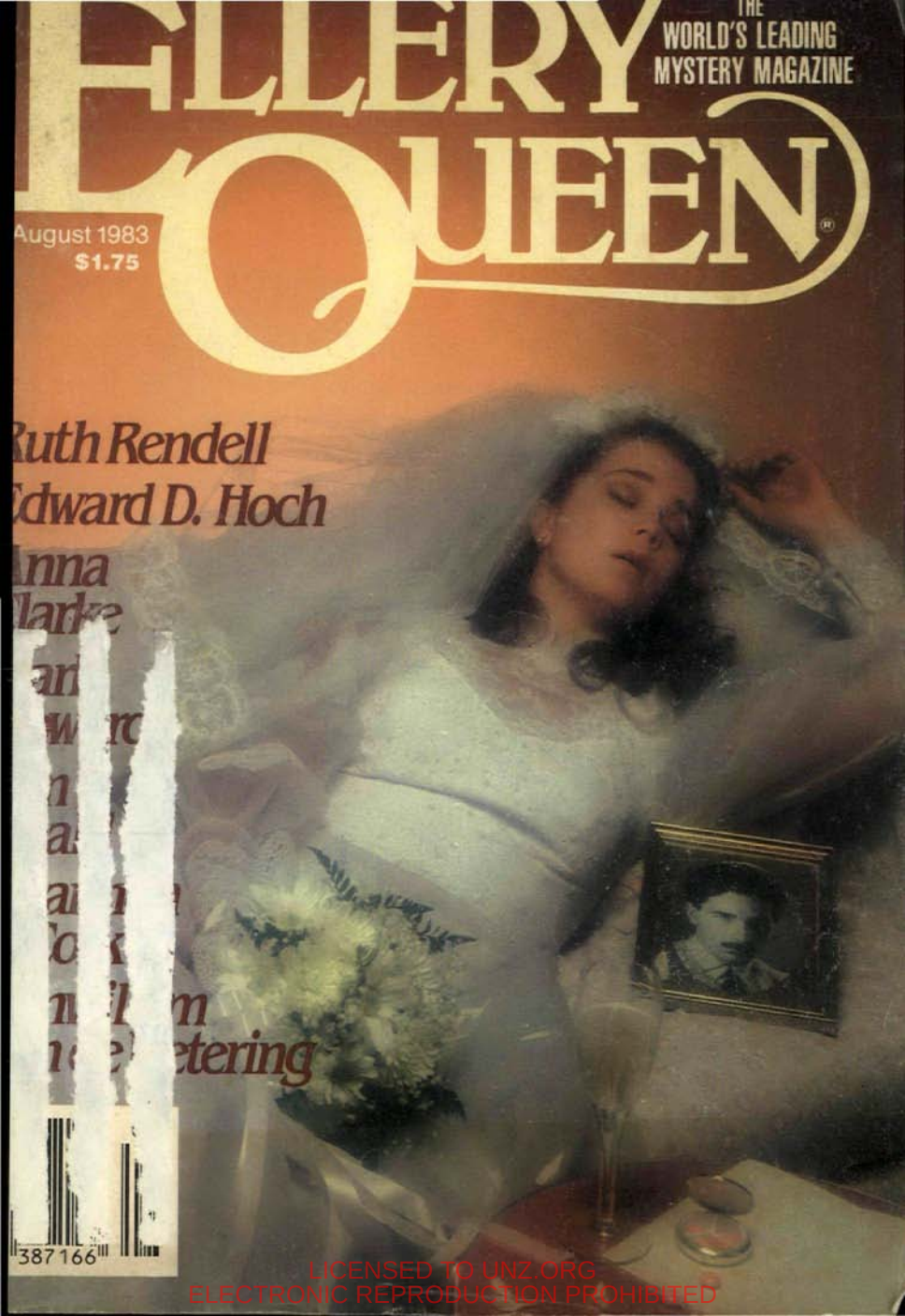

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Another visit and another libation with Dr. Sam Hawthorne, who this time, as promised, tells us about a case Sheriff Lens solved without Dr. Sam's help—the case of a body found in a tarpaulin-covered haystack . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE BODY IN THE HAYSTACK

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"This time I promised to tell you about the case Sheriff Lens solved by himself," Dr. Sam Hawthorne said as he filled the glasses from a newly opened bottle of brandy and settled down in his favorite chair. "Oh, I solved it, but he beat me to the solution. I'm gettin' ahead of my story, though. This all happened during an especially quiet time in Northmont. We'd gone eight months without a murder or a serious crime . . ."

It was in July of 1931 (Dr. Sam continued), a time of deep depression for the country but a peaceful, almost listless summer for our town. The biggest excitement was a black bear that seemed to have taken up residence in Holland Woods and was preyin' on farmers' livestock. By this time Northmont had its own veterinarian, a pleasant chap a few years younger than me whose name was Bob Withers. He'd been kept busy patching up the animals lucky enough to have survived the bear's attacks and putting others out of their misery.

This day I'd been over to Pilgrim Memorial Hospital checking on one of my patients who'd just given birth to twins and another who'd had minor surgery. It was a hot, humid afternoon of the sort that

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often produces a summer thunderstorm in our part of the country, so as I drove back along Cob Hill Road I wasn't surprised to see farmers covering their haystacks with canvas tarpaulins to guard against a sudden downpour.

I recognized the tall, gaunt frame of Felix Benet driving stakes into the ground to anchor one of his tarps, and I pulled the Stutz up to the side of the road to speak to him. Felix was over six feet tall and wore a wide-brimmed hat in the field to keep the sun off his fair complexion. I told him once he had to keep moving or people might mistake him for a scarecrow at a distance. He was a taciturn man by nature, though I could usually get a smile and a few words out of him. He'd been farming his land for as long as I'd been in Northmont, and with better than three hundred acres his was one of the largest farms in the county.

"Keeping the hay dry, Felix?" I called to him, jumping a little ditch to walk out and join him.

"Tryin' to," he responded. He put down the sledgehammer and wiped his sweaty palms on the front of his bib overalls.

"Seen anything of the bear lately?"

He spit out a wad of chewing tobacco and took off the big straw hat for a moment to mop his brow. His answers were always slow in coming, as if they had to filter through some inner mechanism. "Too much. He killed one o' my pigs last night. Doc Withers is up to the house now."

"Sorry to hear that." I squinted into the afternoon sun and saw the vet's horse-drawn wagon standing near the Benet farmhouse. "Maybe I'll stop by and say hello to Bob."

"Tell Sarah I'll be home presently. Just got one more haystack to cover after this one and that's up near the house. I'll do that later." It was a long speech for him, and he lapsed into silence again, spitting on his hands and lifting the sledgehammer to continue driving pegs around the base of the stack. I watched for a moment and then walked back to the car.

At the farmhouse I pulled into the driveway behind Bob Withers' wagon full of vet equipment, causing his horse to prance about nervously. The screen door was unlatched, and when no one responded to my knock I walked right in. Country doctors were used to doing that. The first thing I saw was Sarah Benet tussling with someone on the sofa, and by that time it was too late to back out and come in again.

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Bob Withers got quickly to his feet, adjusting his clothing and looking sheepish. "Hello, Sam. I didn't hear you."

"I knocked," I assured them.

Sarah Benet was a good deal younger than her husband, but she was older than Withers by some ten years. She stood up, brushed the soft brown hair from her eyes, and said, with all the composure in the world, "What can I do for you, Doctor?"

"I was just chatting with Felix down the road and he told me Bob was here. You had another bear attack last night?"

"Killed one of our pigs and slashed another with its claws," she answered. "Dr. Withers just finished treating it."

Withers seemed anxious to get me out of the house. He guided me toward the door. "We've got to do something to stop that bear, Sam, or one of these times he'll get himself a human victim. Can't Sheriff Lens round up a posse to hunt him down?"

We stepped out on the porch and down to the dusty driveway. Bob Withers was a bit shorter than me, but his legs moved fast, urging me away from the house. For a moment I was afraid he might comment on the scene I'd witnessed, and I tried to prevent that by chattering on about the bear. "The sheriff hunts deer in season but somehow I can't imagine him going after a bear," I said. "Did it come all the way into the pigpen?"

"Sure did—come on, I'll show you."

It was along one side of the barn, about a hundred feet from the house, and as we neared it I could see the place where the fence had been knocked down. "Probably come back tonight, too," Withers commented, "since he knows there's food here."

"That might be worth a call to the sheriff," I admitted. "Maybe I'll use the phone in the house."

As I turned back, he started to say something else. "Sam, I'd—"

"Yes, Bob?"

"Nothing. You'd better call the sheriff." He went over to see how the injured pig was coming along.

When I reentered the house, Sarah called out from the kitchen. "Bob?"

"No, Mrs. Benet, it's Dr. Hawthorne. Could I use your telephone to call Sheriff Lens?"

She came into the parlor, her face white with fright. "What is it? Felix didn't—"

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"It's just about the bear," I hurriedly assured her. "Bob thinks it'll be back tonight, and maybe the sheriff could set a trap for it."

"Oh! Certainly. The phone is right in here."

I cranked it up and gave the operator the sheriff's number. When he came on I told him the situation with the bear. "I suppose I could come out an' lend Benet a hand with it tonight," he agreed. "Bears are a bit outa my line, but folks have been raisin' a fuss about it, and there's an election comin' up in a few months."

I chuckled. "That would make a great campaign poster, you standing next to the bear's body with your foot restin' on it. Like Teddy Roosevelt."

"Yeah," he said, warming to the idea. "Tell 'em I'll drive out after supper."

I hung up and repeated the message to Sarah Benet.

There was a noise from the back of the house and I thought it was Felix returned from the fields, but it was only Hal Perry, the fellow who was something between a hired hand and a tenant farmer on the Benet place. He had his own little house out across the field and farmed part of the land himself, but he also helped out with chores and lent a hand to Felix at planting and harvest time. I'd always considered him something of a mystery man, keeping to himself as if he were hiding out from something.

" 'Lo there, Doc," he greeted me. "Somebody sick?" He reached into his overalls for a plug of tobacco.

"No, I stopped by to talk with Dr. Withers about the bear. You seen anything of it out your end of the field?"

"Saw tracks in the dirt, that's all. He's a big one if you ask me—big and mean." Perry lumbered away, ducking his head of thinning black hair to clear the door frame to the kitchen.

Sarah Benet waited till he was out of earshot, busy getting water at the pump, and said to me, "What you saw in here before—"

"I didn't see a thing, Mrs. Benet," I assured her.

"Thank you," she said softly and turned away.

I went back outside just as Felix came in from the field. "You still here, Doc? How about stayin' for supper?"

"No, I wouldn't want to put your wife to the bother."

"No bother at all! Maybe Doc Withers will want to stay, too. You fellas can talk about the differences between treatin' horses and people."

"Horses have four legs," Withers said, coming up to join us. "That's the only difference."

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"There's one other," I observed. "Horses can't tell you what's wrong with them."

"Sometimes people can't either, at least not so's you can understand them," Bob Withers replied.

Sarah came out on the porch then and Felix insisted she set two more places at the table. The Benets had no children so most times there were only the two of them, plus Hal Perry, for meals. I felt a bit awkward about staying under the circumstances, but Withers seemed glad to have me along.

We sat around the big oak table in the kitchen while Sarah finished baking a ham and served it to us. I was used to dinner invitations from my patients, but this was only the second time I'd dined with the Benets. The supper conversation seemed strained, though I may have imagined it. We were just starting dessert—one of Sarah's famous raspberry pies—when there was a noisy interruption. A Model T Ford had pulled into the driveway behind my Stutz, hitting lightly against my bumper as it came to a stop.

Felix and I both went out on the porch to see what had happened. There was no damage to my car, but I was a bit annoyed when the driver of the Model T—a short man with a bristly black mustache—made no effort to apologize. In fact, he ignored me altogether and spoke to Felix instead. "You don't remember me, do you?"

Benet stood frozen to the top step of the porch. "I remember you, Rawson," he said, his lips barely moving. "What brought you back here?"

A smile formed beneath the mustache, but there was no humor in it. "I'm just out of prison, Felix. Nine long years. Remember I told you I'd come to see you when I got out?"

"Get off my property, Rawson," Felix Benet said quietly.

"Oh, come on—you don't scare me any more!"

Benet turned his head and called, "Hal, come out here!"

Hal Perry came through the screen door and joined us on the porch. Perry was a big man and looked as if he could break Rawson in two, though he made no threatening move. Rawson kept on smiling. "This your latest bodyguard, Felix? Is he livin' back in my house?"

"I'm telling you again—get off my property."

"You heard him," Hal Perry said.

Rawson seemed to hesitate, debating his next move. Finally he decided to back off. "All right, but you haven't heard the last of me,

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Felix. Next time I'll come around when you're alone. And it'll be soon." He got in the car and backed out of the driveway.

"What was that all about?" I asked Benet as we returned to the table.

"I guess it was just before you came to Northmont, Doc," Felix said, reseating himself and tucking in his napkin. "I've always tried to help people. Like ex-convicts. Give them another chance at life. Jake Rawson was one I helped. He lived in the little house out in back where Hal is now. Farmed his own little land and helped me with the chores. He was on parole from a twenty-year manslaughter sentence. Killed his former employer in a fight. He had nine years left to serve when they let him out. Things were fine for a while, but one night he got drunk and went after Sarah. I don't know what he intended, but I couldn't take any chances after that. I turned him in to his parole officer and he was sent back to prison for the rest of his term. He swore he'd come after me when he got out."

"I never thought we'd see him again," Sarah said. "That's a long time to hold a grudge." She was staring at her plate, unable to meet our eyes.

"He won't be back," Perry said. "I know his type." For the first time it occurred to me that Perry too might be an ex-convict.

"I hope you're right," Benet said. "He was nothing but a troublemaker."

Bob Withers glanced out the kitchen window. "Here comes Sheriff Lens. Maybe you'd better tell him about it."

The sheriff had indeed arrived, as promised, and parked his car behind mine. When he came in, he carried a rifle under one arm. "Here I am," he announced. "Loaded for bear."

We were all silent for a moment and then Sarah Benet spoke up. "We've had some other trouble here, Sheriff. My husband has been threatened." She told him about Rawson's visit.

Of course Sheriff Lens had been in Northmont longer than me, and he remembered the earlier trouble with Jake Rawson. "We sent him back to prison once, and we can do it again if he tries anything." He accepted an offer of Sarah's raspberry pie and dug into it with unconcealed relish. Then except for Sarah and Bob we all trooped outside.

For his part, Felix Benet tended to downplay Jake Rawson's visit. He was more interested in the problem of the bear. "You plannin' to spend the night and help us get him, Sheriff?"

"Sure am."

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"I figure if you're on the back porch, with a good view from the pigpen all the way out to that nearest haystack, and Hal is over at his house the other side of the field and I'm in the barn, we can get him in a crossfire if he comes back."

"Just make sure you don't shoot each other," I cautioned.

The early evening sun, already low in the western sky, was beginning to disappear behind a threatening black cloud and this reminded Benet of an unfinished task. "Damn it, Hal, I forgot to cover that last haystack. We'd better get right at that before it rains."

Sheriff Lens and I went back in the house where Withers and Sarah were deep in conversation. It seemed an appropriate time for me to depart. I thanked her for the delicious supper and then asked the sheriff to move his car so I could get out. "I'll be leaving soon, too," Withers said.

Sheriff Lens nodded. "I'll park out on the road and leave the driveway clear." We chatted with Sarah a few more minutes and then left.

As the sheriff and I walked out to our cars, I saw Felix Benet out in the field with his straw hat on once more, securing the tarpaulin over the haystack nearest the house. "Goodbye, Felix!" I yelled. "Good luck tonight!"

He waved and went back to his work. As soon as the driveway was clear, I got in my car and backed out. By that time Felix had finished tying down the tarp and was heading over toward Hal Perry's little house at the other end of the field.

The sky had darkened considerably and the first drops of rain fell as I drove back to town. Along the way I passed Jake Rawson's Ford parked in a patch of tall weeds off the road. He was nowhere in sight.

I was in bed by midnight, dreaming of haystacks and bears, when the telephone awakened me. It was not an unusual sound for a doctor to hear in the night and I rolled over to answer it, expecting to hear one of my patients or perhaps my nurse April with news of some accident.

Instead I heard a barely recognizable voice whispering, "Doc, this is Felix Benet. I need help."

"Is it the bear?" I asked.

"No, it—" Then the phone went dead.

I called the Benet house at once and waited while the phone rang several times. Finally Sheriff Lens answered and I asked where

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Benet was. "He's in the barn, Doc. I saw him go in hours ago. No sign of the bear yet."

"There's no telephone in the barn, is there?"

"No."

"Because Benet just called me from somewhere. He sounded as if he was in trouble."

"I'll go check on him and call you back, Doc."

I sat on the bed waiting for the call, almost fearing what Sheriff Lens might find in the barn. But when he called back five minutes later he said, "Benet's not in the barn and Sarah says he's not upstairs either. Do you think something's happened to him, Doc?"

"I don't know. I'd better drive out and see. Check with Perry in the meantime—he might have seen something."

"You think Rawson came back?"

"He never left. I spotted his car about a mile down the road on my way home."

"You shoulda called us."

"I didn't think he'd try anything with you on the scene, Sheriff. I'll be out soon."

The rain hadn't amounted to much and now a full moon had replaced the clouds, bathing the landscape in a soft glow. I enjoyed driving on nights like this, when the roads were empty and visibility was good. As I neared the spot where I'd seen the Ford, I searched for it among the weeds, but if it was still there it had been pulled further into the woods, out of sight in the darkness. Around the next bend the Benet farm came into view.

I'd expected to find Sheriff Lens out in front to greet me but he was still at his post on the back porch, single-mindedly watching for the bear. Hal Perry was with him now, and Sarah came to the door in a bathrobe as I arrived.

"Any sign of Felix, Sarah?" I asked.

"No. I'm worried, Dr. Sam."

"We'll find him," I said with more assurance than I felt.

I went out back to talk with the sheriff and Hal Perry.

"Hal hasn't seen anything of him since he went to the barn," Sheriff Lens told me. "I suppose he might have heard some noise and gone into the woods after the bear."

"Or Jake Rawson," I said.

But Perry shook his head. "He wouldn't have gone alone."

"Tell me everything that happened after I left."

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Sheriff Lens shrugged. "Nuthin' happened, Doc. Benet finished covering that haystack there—"

"I was still here then. I saw that."

"—and walked around in the field a bit before the rain. He went over toward Perry's place and called out something to him."

"What was that?" I asked Perry.

"He just wanted to make sure I was in position with my rifle. It was gettin' on toward dark and we wanted to be ready for the bear. I called back that I was there."

"Did he go into your place?"

"No, just stood about fifty feet away and called to me. I didn't come out, either. Just told him I was set. Then it started to rain and he headed back toward the barn."

Sarah was listening from the doorway and I turned to her. "He didn't come back to the house, Sarah?"

She hesitated before replying. "No. I haven't seen him since supper."

"How long did Withers stay?"

"Only a few minutes after you left."

"And none of you saw anything of Felix after he entered the barn."

"Not a thing," Perry confirmed.

"So Jake Rawson or someone else could have sneaked up on him in there."

"You're forgettin' the phone call," Sheriff Lens said.

It was Perry who interrupted us then, pointing out across the moonlit field. "I saw something move! Maybe it's Felix!"

I strained my eyes and saw the shadows shifting slightly at the edge of the woods. "Something's out there," I agreed, lowering my voice.

After another minute Sheriff Lens whispered, "I think it's the bear!"

It came across from the far end of the field, moving with that lumbering motion one associates with bears. At that distance it was only a black form, an animated shadow that had detached itself from the woods, but there could be no doubt it was the bear. "Headin' for the pigpen," Perry said. "I'll try to circle around him. When he reaches the pen, you fire first, Sheriff. If you miss, I'll have a shot before he can get back to the woods."

The bear kept coming until it was about a hundred feet from the barn. Then, inexplicably, it changed course and headed for the haystack instead. "Where's he goin'?" the sheriff wanted to know.

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"Sniffing around at the haystack," I said. "Can you hit him from here?"

"I'd like to get a bit closer." He moved slowly, carefully, off the porch.

I was afraid the bear might sense his approach, but the beast was now actually clawing at the canvas tarpaulin over the haystack. Sheriff Lens had halved the distance between them before the bear finally turned from its task. Then the sheriff dropped to one knee, sighted quickly, and fired. An instant later Hal Perry fired from the orchard. The bear gave a massive growl, turning first one way and then the other. Sheriff Lens had time for a second shot before the beast finally turned toward the woods. It ran perhaps twenty feet before it collapsed and lay still.

"Good shooting," Perry told the sheriff as we converged on the bear.

"You, too. Better give him one more in the head to make sure."

Perry fired a final shot and then we moved in closer. The bear, a big black one weighing perhaps two or three hundred pounds, was indeed dead. "There's your campaign picture, Sheriff," I said.

Sarah Benet came out across the field to join us. "Any sign of Felix?" she asked.

"Not a thing," Sheriff Lens told her. "If he doesn't turn up by daybreak we'll send a search party into the woods."

But I had another idea. "You go back to the house now, Sarah," I told her gently. "That bear's not a pretty sight."

When she reluctantly departed, the two men turned to me. "What are you thinkin'?" Perry asked.

"That haystack. I want to see what the bear was after under that tarp."

We worked silently in the moonlight, untying the ropes that held it in place. There seemed to be nothing but hay beneath it, until I had them pull the tarpaulin off to one side. Then, prodding gently with their rifles, they found the body near the top of the stack.

It was Felix Benet. The row of wounds across his chest indicated he'd been stabbed with a pitchfork.

By that time it was nearly two in the morning, but there were things that had to be done. The hardest was breaking the news to Sarah. Her tears seemed genuine enough, but I couldn't be certain after what I'd seen earlier.

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"I have to ask you some questions," I said. "It might be easier talking to me than to the sheriff."

"You think I had something to do with this?"

"No. Not directly."

She caught my meaning at once. "Bob! You think it was Bob?"

"I didn't say that. But maybe you should call and tell him. It would look good if he was here."

Sheriff Lens came in while she was talking to him on the phone. "What's that?"

"I thought Bob Withers should be here."

"Doc Withers? What for? The bear don't need him."

"He was here earlier. He's a suspect."

The sheriff shook his head. "You know somethin', Doc—this here's another one of your damn impossible crimes."

"How come?"

"We all saw Felix coverin' that haystack with the tarp. And now he's dead inside it. But, damn it, Doc, I was sittin' on that back porch every minute after you left, watching for the bear—even before it got dark. There's no way anyone could have killed Felix and put his body in there. Hell, they'd have to untie the tarp and take it all the way off to get the body up near the top like that."

"Well, you probably went to the outhouse for a minute."

"No, sir!"

"Or back into the kitchen for more coffee."

"No, I didn't!"

"Maybe you dozed off for a few minutes."

"I was wide awake the whole time!" he replied indignantly. "Listen, you saw the trouble it took three of us to get that tarp untied and off the haystack. The killer woulda had to do the same, and then put it back on again."

"There are a couple of other possibilities," I pointed out. "The far side of the haystack was out of sight from the porch the whole time. And even though the moon is bright, it *was* night. The killer could have dragged Benet's body across the field, keeping the haystack between himself and the house, and then just shoved the body under the edge of the tarp."

"You know better than that, Doc. Felix was way up near the top of the stack. And that field out there is still a little damp from the rain. It don't show footprints too well, but it sure would show signs of a body bein' dragged across it—even if that could have been done without me or Hal seein' it. Hal was watchin' the field from the

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other direction—he'd have seen anyone comin' up on the haystack from behind."

"What *about* Hal?" I asked the sheriff. "What's his background?"

Sarah Benet had finished her phone call to Withers and joined us in time to answer. "Felix always tried to help the unfortunate. He kept that little house back in the field for former convicts trying to start a new life. Jake Rawson didn't turn out too well, but I urged him to try again. Hal's been with us nearly nine years now without a problem."

"What was he in prison for?"

"Not manslaughter like Rawson, I can assure you. Some sort of theft or embezzlement."

"Is there a phone in his house?"

"No. He comes up here when he needs one."

"What's this about a phone?" the sheriff asked.

"Remember I told you? Felix called me from somewhere before he died. It's beginning to look like it had to be from this house."

"I was right on the back porch. I'd have seen him."

"Maybe not, Sheriff. He could have circled around to the road and come in the front."

"Why would he go to all that trouble to call for help when I was sittin' on his back porch with a rifle—all the protection he needed?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "Look, let me try something. This phone has to be cranked, and I want to see if the sound of it would carry to the back porch or upstairs. You two go to where you were earlier."

I tried cranking the phone three times, but the sound didn't carry upstairs or through the back door. The call could have been made from the house without their knowing. But that didn't prove it had been.

Next I phoned the hospital to send an ambulance for Felix's body. I wanted to examine it as soon as possible, to try to determine how long he'd been dead. Then I went outside to talk with Hal Perry. "You were in trouble with the law once," I said.

"Yeah. I served some time. Stole some money from a place where I worked. But Felix was awful good to me here. He really cared about seein' I got a fresh start."

I was about to ask him something else when we both heard a noise from the barn. "Come on!" I said, breaking into a run. It wasn't the sort of noise animals make—more the sort a person makes knocking over some rakes and pitchforks.

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"I have a gun!" I shouted into the barn. "Come out with your hands up!"

After a moment's silence, a figure emerged from the shadows. It was Jake Rawson, dressed as he had been earlier that evening. He lowered his hands when he saw us more clearly. "You don't have no gun at all. I fell for the oldest trick in the world."

"What are you doing back here, Rawson?"

He squinted at me in the dim light. "You're the doc, ain't you? Well, I just come back to settle an old score with Benet."

"Looks like you did that all right. We found his body in the haystack."

"What? I don't believe it."

"It's true," I assured him. "And you're the number one suspect."

"I didn't come here to kill him—just give him a few good fists in the face for getting my parole revoked. You think I'd be dumb enough to announce myself like I did if I meant to kill him?"

"Maybe. I've no idea how smart you are." I turned to Perry. "Let's bring him back to the house."

Just as we reached the side porch, headlights targeted us and a car pulled into the driveway. It was Bob Withers, driving his Packard instead of the horse and wagon filled with equipment he'd had earlier.

"What's happened?" he asked. "Sarah said someone killed Felix." He glanced at Rawson, then suddenly recognized him. "Did he do it?"

"We don't know," I replied. "There's a problem as to just how it was done."

"Sarah said it was with a pitchfork."

My mind raced back, trying to remember if I'd mentioned the apparent murder weapon to her. Yes, I was pretty sure I had. "That's right," I agreed. "But the body was on a haystack, under a tarpaulin. We don't know how it got there."

We went into the house and Withers made some effort to comfort Sarah. I couldn't hear what he said to her, but a few moments later I saw her go into the pantry. The door didn't close completely behind her and I could see her take something from a shelf, dropping it into the wastebasket. I waited until she returned and then managed to slip through the kitchen to the pantry. I retrieved the small package from the wastebasket and slipped it into my pocket without looking at it.

When I returned to the parlor, the ambulance from the hospital

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was just pulling into the driveway. Sheriff Lens directed the attendants to the body, saying to me, "We can search the area and take some pictures by daylight. There's nothing to see right now."

I nodded. "I want to examine the body more thoroughly. I'm going to follow the ambulance to the hospital and look it over. Then I'll get back here and let you know if I found anything."

"I won't be staying around too long myself. Perry can deal with the dead bear in the morning." He frowned and looked at me. "What do you think, Doc? How did the body get in the haystack?"

"You know my methods, Sheriff," I said, paraphrasing one of those popular fictional detectives. "You think about it."

Sheriff Lens looked unhappy. "Is there anything special you could point out to me?"

I smiled and said, "The curious incident of the bear in the nighttime."

"Huh?"

"And the bushy mustache of Mr. Jake Rawson."

"What in hell are you talkin' about?"

"Think about it, Sheriff," I repeated, and went out to my car.

It was hardly necessary to examine Felix Benet's body at the hospital, but I wanted confirmation of what was only a theory. He still wore the clothes he'd had on earlier, except for the hat, but in death he seemed somehow smaller. The body was already cold when I examined it, and rigor mortis was well advanced. That was as I had expected.

I was pretty sure I knew then what had happened, and I knew I'd have to tell Sheriff Lens. I telephoned the jail, hoping he might have gone back there, and he answered the phone. "Hello, Doc. I still haven't figured out those clues you gave me."

"Maybe I'll drop over and explain them, Sheriff. It looks like neither of us is going to get much sleep anyway."

"Well, you don't have to, Doc. Not really. See, I solved the case without them."

"What?"

"I arrested the killer a little while after you left, and I got a full confession."

"I'll be damned!" I said. "I'll be right over."

He was sitting in his office at the jail, beaming all over. "I finally solved one on my own, Doc."

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"Tell me about it."

"First off, you tell me what you meant by them clues. What about the bear in the nighttime?"

"All right. The bear was attracted by the scent of Benet's dead body. To me that indicated that Benet had been dead for a while—a few hours, anyway. A freshly killed body under that tarpaulin probably wouldn't have given off enough odor to attract the bear."

"Maybe," Sheriff Lens said uncertainly. "What about the mustache?"

"Rawson's bushy mustache was the best proof he was telling the truth about his intention to beat up Benet rather than kill him. He never would have been allowed to grow that mustache in prison, so it told me he'd been out for several weeks or maybe months. That didn't sound like a man obsessed with killing the person who sent him to prison. Revenge, yes, but not a driving obsession, or he wouldn't have waited those weeks or months."

"Yes," the sheriff agreed. "I can see that."

"So who did you arrest?"

He grinned at me. "You mean you don't know, Doc?"

"It's your solution, Sheriff. I want to hear you tell it."

"Well, the whole impossibility came about because we didn't know what time Felix was killed. Nobody had to take that tarpaulin off the haystack or sneak the body up under it. Felix was dead when the tarp was first put on. He was dead before you left the farm last evening."

He had it. He had the answer and he'd come up with it by himself. "But we both saw him alive."

"No we didn't, Doc. We saw the killer wearin' Benet's big straw hat to hide his face and the color of his hair. Benet left the house and walked out to that haystack, and the killer, dressed the same, in overalls, stuck him with a pitchfork. Then he put on the hat, hoisted the body up into the haystack, and pulled the tarpaulin over it—in a matter of minutes, with no witnesses. The actual murder probably happened on the far side of the haystack, out of view of the house."

"And which one imitated him?"

"You know that as well as I do, Doc. It couldn't have been Sarah, certainly. Or Bob Withers, who's shorter than you. Or Jake Rawson, another short man. It could only have been Hal Perry, who's tall like Benet—so tall, in fact, he has to duck his head goin' through doorways."

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"Yes," I agreed. "It was Perry. Did he tell you his motive?"

"Sure. He'd been robbin' Felix for years, skimming off some of the money when he took produce to market. Benet grew suspicious and Perry was afraid he'd be sent back to prison. When Rawson arrived on the scene, he saw the perfect opportunity for a scapegoat. He killed Felix with a pitchfork there by the haystack and then put on his hat. From a distance we thought it was Felix covering the stack with a tarpaulin. He was only trying to hide the body till early morning, when he planned to carry it into the woods where it would look like Jake Rawson had ambushed Felix. But the bear sniffed it out first."

I nodded. "Perry was wearing overalls like Benet, and with the straw hat to hide his face and black hair he passed for him at that distance. He waved to me when I left but didn't speak. You said he walked toward the little house and called—pretended to call—to Perry. But Perry supposedly stayed in the house, so you never saw them together. Then he went to the barn. At midnight he slipped into the house through the front door and phoned me, whispering to make me think it was Benet and that he was still alive at that time. Then he slipped out again and back to his place before I phoned and talked to you."

"What if we'd gone to the barn earlier—Sarah or me?"

"He'd simply have said Benet went off into the woods. It was a pretty safe scheme, except for the bear sniffing out the body. But how'd you figure it was Perry?"

The sheriff smiled proudly. "It was that straw hat, o' course. Felix wore it to keep the sun off, but there was no sun when he went out to cover that last haystack. Remember those dark clouds? I asked myself why he was wearin' the hat. Later it dawned on me."

I went to Felix Benet's funeral two days later, and after the service I went back to the Benet farm one more time. Bob Withers was there, and some of the neighbors and friends of the dead man. When I had a chance to be alone in the kitchen with Sarah I took a small packet from my pocket and showed it to her in the palm of my hand.

"I saw you throw this away the other night," I said quietly.

"What?" She made a grab for it but I closed my fist in time.

"It's a sample of a new kind of rat poison for veterinarians to use around barns where there's a rat problem with livestock. Bob Withers gave you this, didn't he? And after we found Felix's body you decided you didn't need it after all."

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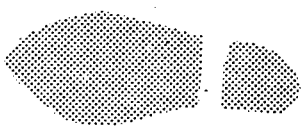
"I—" She tried to speak but her voice seemed to have deserted her.

"Poor old Felix. There were so many people who wanted him dead."

I went out to the car and drove home. That night I flushed the rat poison down the toilet.

"So that was how Sheriff Lens solved the problem of the body in the haystack," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "Hal Perry got twenty years to life in prison, and Sarah married Bob Withers. She sold the farm, he turned his practice over to another vet, and they moved away. I never heard what became of them.

"A few months later, in the autumn of '31, I took a little vacation for myself. But you can't get away from murder, as I learned when I spent a stormy night in a lighthouse and tangled with a ghostly pirate. But that'll be next time you come for a visit and a little libation."



DETECTIVERSE

NEAR THE HOLLYHOCKS

by ALICE NAOMI OVINGTON

A tyrannical miser named Cox
Forced his wife to darn all his old sox.
She wanted those hours
For tending her flowers,
So she planted Cox under the phlox.

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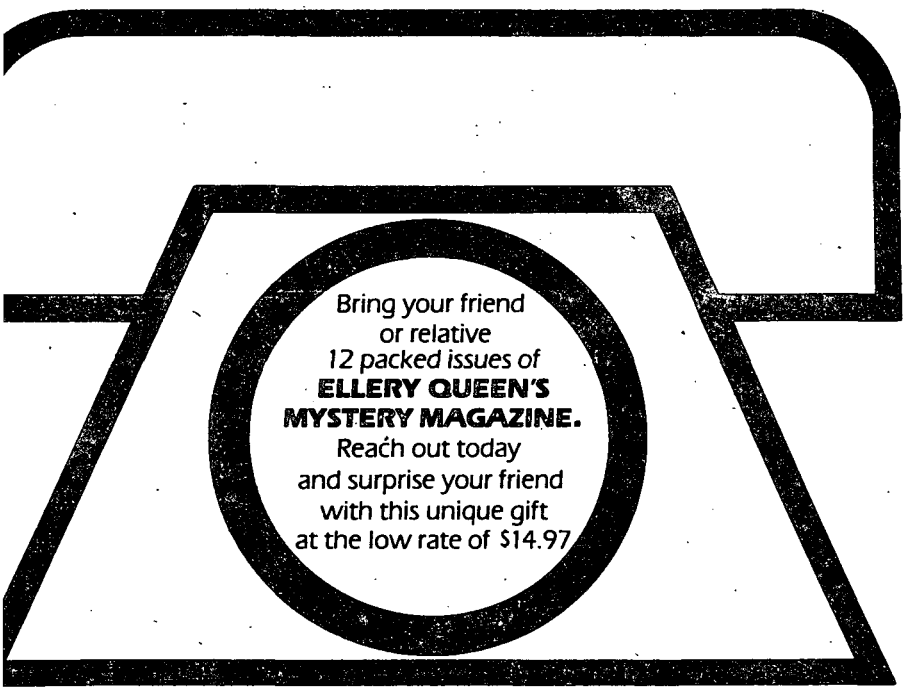

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a *NEW* short story by

SHANNON OCORK

Running. When Dick Cavett asked Jonathan Miller if he ever jogged, he said he ran only in flight or pursuit. Which may also be the case with Brad and Patterson, the college track stars you are about to meet, kindness of Shannon OCork. We're delighted to welcome Shannon OCork to EQMM. Her latest novel, Hell Bent for Heaven, *features a rodeo in Madison Square Garden, a stampede up Eighth Avenue, and a bullfight in Times Square. Olé, Shannon! . . .*

NIGHT RUN

by SHANNON OCORK

He heard the footfalls at the eighth mile, where the course turned north around the west wall of the campus. Thuk-thuk-thuk-suh, thuk-thuk-thuk-suh. Someone was closing in in the dark, and, tonight, Brad did not expect that. The only one able to challenge him after six miles was Patterson, and Patterson should be long dead by now; stiffening already. Brad was forty minutes into the race; his distance told him that. His body told him that.

Whoever it was, he was coming up fast, threatening as Patterson usually did, just here, where the dirt path was blackest, where it swung right and ran along the stone wall for a mile and a half. The runner was back still, sixteen–seventeen paces off Brad's lead. It was too dark to identify the runner with a backward glance—the white number on his chest would not shine here under the ceiling of willow branches—so Brad didn't waste his energy in head movements. He was attuned to competition and did not panic at a challenge, especially one too early, two-thirds into a twelve-mile race that had Billygoat Hill two miles ahead. (But Patterson always

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threatened too early; threatened and passed and won.) So, no, Brad was not panicking, but he was surprised to hear behind him, *so close,* thudding, quickening footfalls.

Brad listened to the cadence of the running. Its rhythm was familiar and he knew it well. For three years he had run with the staccato sounds of Patterson's rabbity, toe-first strides in his ears, Patterson's jerky pounding behind, abreast, and ahead, Patterson's unorthodox loping, off-beat to Brad's own flowing heel-first roll through the foot, Brad's own textbook-beautiful *slup-sloop, slup-sloop, slup-sloop, soooo.*

The sounds behind, slight as they yet were in the night ar, on the night ground, focused Brad's free-floating attention. He could tell, without consciously calculating, the approximate speed of the strides by their sounds and intervals of silence. And the runner behind was gaining.

Brad passed into slivered-moon brightness. He knew the route intimately. At this pace, he had thirty-six steps of wall bare of trees before the way was draped again by the lacey overhang of giant willows. Brad pressed a button on his Casio digital. On this wrist, black numbers glowed against white background: 41:20.9, 41:21.0 . . . He was more than forty minutes into the race.

Whoever was dumb enough to come at him here, it wasn't Patterson this time. Couldn't be. Patterson should be, by now, literally stopped in his tracks. Brad sprinted the clearing in thirty-one steps to discourage the fool who thought he could match number one. (Number one, that is, now that Patterson was removed—rubbed out with a bit of nicotine-contaminated athlete's-foot salve. Self-applied, *rub-a-dub-gone,* just like that.) Ten minutes, the medical encyclopedia had said, for pure nicotine to kill; twenty minutes tops.

Brad listened. His increased speed had not daunted the runner behind. The thunking footfalls were closer than ever now, maybe twelve paces off Brad's right shoulder, *hurrying,* in Patterson's peculiar, eccentric rhythm. *Thuk-thuk-thuk—*

Brad deepened his breathing, settled lower in his stride, and increased his time to five-minute miles. Nobody at the university could put two five-minute miles back-to-back in a long run except himself and Patterson. They could do even better when they had to. And against each other, they usually had.

Brad ran under a canopy of trees into cool night shadow. *Slap-sloop, slap-sloop, slap-sloop-soooo.*

Patterson deserved to die, there was no getting around that. Pat-

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terson (on purpose—Brad knew it was on purpose) had infected Brad with the foot fungus; he had strutted barefoot around the locker room, shower-wet, spreading his disease. Patterson had wiped his hairy, infected toes with Brad's towel. Remembering it now in the dark of the run, Brad got angry all over again. Patterson was (*had been, had been*) an inconsiderate, superstitious, narcissistic bastard. He'd even made a pass at Jeannie.

"Your friend with the kangaroo-bounce asked to run with me tomorrow. Said he'd give me some pointers. Do you mind?"

"No. Patterson's crazy, Jeannie, he's eccentric and superstitious, but he's good. I like to run with him. I push him, he pushes me, and I haven't beaten him yet at distance. I don't mind his funny ways . . ."

And he hadn't minded, until Patterson used Brad's towel and passed along his athlete's foot. (On purpose; had to be on purpose.) Everybody knew athlete's foot was almost as contagious as TB, and just about as debilitating to a distance runner.

It happened, too, just as Brad was peaking into prime-performance condition and Patterson, overtrained, was tiring. The last time out together, a fourteen-mile run and no one else in contention, Brad had been within arm's reach when Patterson broke the tape. Two strides more and Brad would have had him. *Two strides!* Brad had collapsed at the end of that try, his toes burning up as though he'd run through fire.

The over-the-counter ointment Patterson suggested hadn't worked. That was when Brad decided to see Dr. Entwhistle.

Even if it was Patterson behind him (which it couldn't be, could it?), Brad thought he could take his rival now. He could beat Patterson on the final flat, the grass-slippery hundred-yard stretch of lawn that led to the campus gate and the white tape fluttering between the fieldstone posts.

Six–seven strides off his left shoulder now, the footfalls ran behind, gaining inches with each step. Brad was beyond the willows, at the beginning of the mile-long incline that was Billygoat Hill, a gradual, ever-rising climb. At its apex, the hill turned abruptly down into a steep half-mile descent, and then there was the tarred path that switched and swung past the university hospital and around the swamp of the parking lot and then became the relative straight of the quad yard and the final grassy sprint.

Brad risked a turn of his head. And looked dead into the white-rimmed irises of Patterson, ghostly aglow in the moonlight.

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Frowning and serious, Patterson ran at Brad, four strides behind and gaining. It was summer and night, but Brad could see the grey evanescence of the expelled *swoosh* of Patterson's breath and hear the lung-pull as air swished in. Patterson was clutching something round and white in his hand. When Brad turned to look, Patterson held the object high in the air and shook it, menacingly, like a stone.

Brad turned his head away. Leaned into Billygoat Hill. So Patterson hadn't used the salve after all. Damn Patterson. Damn Patterson. *Slup-slup-slup-soooo.*

And behind, coming, *thukthukthukthuk . . .*

Dr. Entwhistle was famous in the state as the leading practitioner of sports medicine. Entwhistle taught at the university, lectured throughout the United States, and had his own radio show on Sunday mornings nine to twelve. Brad didn't know anybody who didn't lie in bed Sunday mornings, no matter how long Saturday night lasted, and listen to Dr. Entwhistle. It was good, of course, to have a girl beside you then, and it was best when your girl was a runner, too, like Jeannie, who also listened, who wouldn't miss Dr. Entwhistle for anything.

The doctor wasn't as fanatical as many people seriously into health and fitness are, but Doc Entwhistle was hot on the evils of smoking. In his examining room he had a display. Under an airtight, clear plastic dome was a small saucer of colorless liquid. Above the saucer was a cardboard sign: *Nicotine $C_{10}H_{14}N_2$. An alkaloid. In this saucer is the extract of tobacco leaves. One drop is enough to kill YOU.* To the left of the saucer was a small cardboard tombstone and, beneath that, a cigarette. The cigarette lay upon a white index-card grave, and the card read: *Cigarettes are made of tobacco leaves and contain nicotine.* A piece of white adhesive was taped to the outside of the covering dome. Printed on the tape in black ink was the warning: DO NOT DISTURB. The display sat on the counter shelf of a white cupboard to the left of the patient's chair.

Brad hadn't come to Dr. Entwhistle planning to murder Patterson. He hadn't known about the liquid nicotine; he'd never been in Doc Entwhistle's office before. He had simply gone to Doctor Entwhistle about his athlete's foot, the fungus Patterson had given him. And opportunity had presented itself.

What Doctor Entwhistle told Brad scared him. Athlete's foot, like other dermatophyte infections, sometimes never got cured. It got controlled. Unchecked, athlete's foot (Dr. Entwhistle called it *tinea*

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pedis) could effectively cripple Brad as a competitive runner. So daily washing was imperative, the doctor said—many daily washings—and then a careful drying of the interdigital spaces, rubbing away the softened, scaly skin, then the salve applied without fail, with gloved fingers, and finally a thick dusting of talcum powder. Brad was to go barefoot as often as he could and wear, always with shoes, clean white socks. Sweat exacerbated the condition, Dr. Entwhistle said, and, as runners' feet sweat, it was important Brad attend rigorously to this hygiene. Perhaps, the doctor suggested, Brad could ease up for a time on his workouts and competitive runs.

The suggestion that Brad ease up—that was what did it.

Brad could see how Patterson would want to share his misery. Knowing he was going sour from overtraining, Patterson had tried to halt Brad's progress, too, to keep Brad from surpassing him. So, Brad concluded, sitting humbly in the patient's chair, his eyes upon the saucer of deadly nicotine, Patterson had contaminated him with his wretched disease.

The terrible treachery made Brad seethe inside.

But he sat quietly and listened to the soft admonitions of Dr. Entwhistle. He received all with a subservient nod. He took the wide-mouthed, milkwhite jar of salve with its red-and-white plaid top in a grateful palm. He slumped in his chair, brooding but obedient, when Dr. Entwhistle was called into another room to attend, without delay, a university professor who'd hopped over on a break between classes to have his stomach checked—something to do with Mussels Marinara at the Faculty Club.

And just as Dr. Entwhistle went away, Brad, not thinking it out and almost as though directed by an outer force, glanced at the closed door of the examining room to make sure he was alone. His right hand snaked out to a container of little glass tubes on the counter shelf. He extracted one of the tubelets and with his other hand, the jar of salve firmly between his thighs, he lifted away the plastic dome over the deadly liquid. An odor of decayed leaves suffused his nose.

Brad held his breath against the fumes. Leaning away, he dipped the slim length of hollow glass into the pool of nicotine. He took a cotton ball from a nearby box. To protect his finger from contact, he placed the ball between his finger tip and the end of the glass tube. Having created suction, he drew up a stemful of the toxic liquid. Then the dome down, back in place, and the top of the jar unscrewed, Brad's finger lifted off the pipestem, the suction broke, and the

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poison ran like gloss over the creamy surface of the salve. Still holding his breath, Brad stirred the poison into the top layer of the salve with the glass tubelet, then reset the red-and-white-plaid top on the jar. He darted into the adjoining bathroom, where he flushed away the stem of glass and the cotton ball, rinsed out his mouth, and washed his hands with the deodorant soap that was there. When Doctor Entwhistle returned, Brad was sitting as before.

For some minutes the doctor continued Brad's education in the proper care of *tinea pedis,* and then Brad was dismissed. He left, feeling better than he had in days.

Three hours later, he was back. He told the doctor he'd left the ointment jar under his seat in his American History class and when he returned for it, it was gone. It wasn't true, of course. He had it snug in his running pack, ready to offer to Patterson tonight, before the run, promising spectacular results.

Dr. Entwhistle gave Brad another jar of salve, and Brad was glad to see the lid of this jar was brown.

Brad had barely bested the first third of Billygoat Hill, marked by the Dean of Men's mailbox, when Patterson galloped alongside, frowning, as Patterson did when he ran. Brad strained into the hill and concentrated on keeping his rhythm, but Patterson, alive and apparently well, paced beside.

Between controlled breaths, Patterson said to Brad: "Couldn't use this salve tonight, pal. I never take my footgear off once I've got my socks adjusted right." And not waiting for a reply, he tossed into the air between them the round white object he'd held in his hands like a stone.

Brad lost a stride in surprise and, from reflex, reached into the dark air and pulled down the spinning milkwhite jar with the plaid top. Patterson, yipping a laugh, broke out and away, ahead of Brad up the incline, two strides, three.

But even as Brad's heart sank with the realization that Patterson was not only alive and well but winning again, adrenaline coursed through his veins. He felt new energy, a great new power within. Anger and disappointment? No, hate and fear. Hate and fear flashed red and vivid and over and over in his brain. *Get him, get him* tomtommed his pounding feet. *He's overconditioned, you're prime, you're fine,* his mind mantra'd. He ran into the hill, bent low into the hill, and thundered after Patterson, unconsciously gripping to his belly the jar of poisoned salve.

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He caught up to Patterson where the grade was steepest. Without a word, he hurled the jar back into Patterson's hands and spurted ahead. He reached the crest of the hill six–seven lengths in the lead and dropped like a striking hawk down the sheer descent. He was hitting new times, faster speeds; he had never run so fast nor felt so well. He was beating Patterson, beating Patterson fair and square. With joy, he heard behind him, receding now in his downward plunge, the *thuk-thuk-thuk-suh, thuk-thuk-thuk-suh* of Patterson's unorthodox footfalls.

Brad was running flat-out now, saving nothing. But the power was there. The oxygen flowed from his lungs to his veins, there was no strain in his legs, no effort in his breathing. He had achieved, somehow, in his fear and hate, a new oxygen balance, a personal best.

And now he was on the flat, the tarred path under his feet. His toes burned as they slapped and gripped the warm, spongy black. He dug in, lifted off, flew on, unmindful. He was beating Patterson and that was all he cared about. He longed to hear behind him the vainly challenging *thuks*, but Patterson was too far behind, in the black of the drop down Billygoat Hill.

Brad was on a runner's high, gleeful as he flowed past the university hospital, past the dark windows of Dr. Entwhistle's office. The quarter moon jigged above him, free of cloud.

The crowd of students extended all the way to the outer fringes of the parking lot, swelled in the quad yard, flanked three deep on either side of the lane across the lawn, and then spilled haphazardly beyond the posts and the wisplike tape. Brad saw the last lap spread before him, under the moon, as in a picture postcard. Dormitory lights illuminated it all. It was a beautiful coming home.

He heard the cheering as he flashed into view. A light mitting at first, then a steady, enthusiastic clap, and then the full collegiate *yaaayyyy!* as the bystanders realized the first runner was not Patterson, who always won, but Brad, who was usually second. The spectators loved an upset, they applauded the underdog. Brad ran into the applause dazzled with happiness.

And the power was still there. He knew he could surge across the lawn, kick at the end with style, although unchallenged, alone, way ahead of the pack. The lights swam in his eyes. His own rhythms were drowned in the chanting hurrahs. He ran, ecstatic, into the tape and felt it break like a hymen against his chest. And then he

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slowed and wobbled and fell toward Jeannie—who was there, waiting. Just as he lost consciousness, he heard, like a faraway echo, the *thuk-thuk-thuk-suh* of Patterson, finishing second.

He came back to awareness with a blissful weariness in his muscles and the knowledge of what he had accomplished. He was lying on cool, damp grass. Jeannie was on her knees at his feet. She had unlaced his running shoes and pulled off his sweaty socks. His naked, flaming feet were cradled in a towel on her lap. And Jeannie, his own dear Jeannie, her hands protected from the fungus by rubber gloves as he'd taught her, was massaging his toes, massaging, with love in her face, the salve into the cracks and scales of his burning, fissured feet. Looming behind her, one hand holding the wide-mouthed jar, Patterson, frowning and serious, leaned into the light.

"Hell of a run," said Patterson.

"You're going to be all right now," said Jeannie.

Above Brad, and around, the students were singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." And in the long grass, beside Jeannie's knees, lay the cheerful red-and-white-plaid top.

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a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

The ranks of the Netherlands Municipal Police escalate from constable, constable first-class, sergeant, adjutant, inspector, chief-inspector, commissaris, to chief-constable. It is our great good luck that the incomparable Janwillem van de Wetering once served with the Netherlands Police and chooses to write about it exactly as he does.

"Ho ho ho!" the cops shouted. "Speeding, dear sir? And failing to stop when followed by a patrol car flashing its lights and howling its siren. Are you blind? Are you deaf?" De Gier showed his police card. Grijpstra loosened the microphone from under the dashboard and held it up by way of proof. "Detectives, eh?" the cop on the left said. "Can we come, too?" asked the cop on the right . . .

THE SERGEANT AND THE THREATENED CAT

by *JANWILLEM van de WETERING*

"A shot in the night," Sergeant de Gier of the Amsterdam Municipal Police was saying as he put on his jacket, "does break the routine rather pleasantly." He faced the mirror next to the door and arranged his silk scarf. Adjutant Grijpstra agreed and pushed the sergeant aside. The adjutant held up his left arm and attempted to smooth the fold under his armpit. De Gier raised his arm as well. "My bulge is worse. The new gun is too large."

Grijpstra smiled in the elevator. It had been a quiet evening, with coffee in the canteen and friendly conversation with colleagues. De

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Gier complained contentedly next to him, still on the subject of the new oversize gun. Grijpstra acknowledged his assistant's objections, repeating them in part. The new service handgun was the Walther P-5, and although it was lightweight and aimed well—very well, up to two hundred meters, so Grijpstra stated—the weapon served the plainclothes detective badly, for it was too long.

"And too wide," said de Gier. "All right for the uniformed branch—they show the gun—but we're supposed to hide it."

The elevator door opened, offering a view of a sterile corridor wherein neatly dressed constables marched to and fro. Their clear-blue tunics contrasted sharply with the light-grey corridors. A lady cop came along on long slender legs, her bosom gently bouncing. Her hair was long and blonde, curling from under her small round hat. Grijpstra observed her approvingly. He was working on a painting at home in his spare time. The painting had been set up in outline and now needed color. The policewoman had lilac colored lips. Grijpstra chose the shade for one of the flowers in the foregound of the painting.

She nodded at Grijpstra and greeted de Gier. "Hi, Rinus."

"Hi, Jane," said the sergeant.

"Jane?" Grijpstra asked when they crossed the inner courtyard of Police Headquarters. "Isn't Jane somewhat prosaic for such a luscious woman? Where are we going?"

De Gier got into the unmarked car and opened Grijpstra's door. He waited until Grijpstra had forced his bulk into the car's interior. "What's wrong with Jane? It's a good name. She's a good woman, too. We're headed for the southern suburbs."

The car stopped at the first set of traffic lights. Grijpstra tore at the cellophane cover of a cigar. His eyebrows were still up as he looked at the sergeant again.

De Gier made the car surge forward, following bicycles whose riders were impatient and wouldn't wait for the lights to change. "The shot in the night was fired in Ouborg, an exclusive area for the well heeled."

"And Jane?"

The car was half on the sidewalk, speeding to pass clogged traffic, and de Gier had to pay attention. Finally he reached a square offering more space. "Jane?"

"You said she's a good woman," Grijpstra said patiently. "How do you know? Did you try? With success?"

"Not yet." De Gier avoided more traffic lights by crossing over to

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the part of the boulevard reserved for streetcars, ambulances, and patrol cars. "I think she's good, but it might just be that she's not prepared to prove my point." He looked at Grijpstra triumphantly. "A shot in the night." He hunched his shoulders and lowered his chin so that he could look up and admire tree branches adorning a starry sky. "It's a lovely night, but ripped apart by a shot. That's what the lady on the phone said. She lives next door, in another small palace. She also said that a car drove away after the shot had been fired—an expensive car, silver-shaded. She didn't note the number." He made the car increase speed again. "And she heard a woman scream."

"What do you know," Grijpstra said and glanced over his shoulder. "And look at that."

De Gier looked into his rear mirror. A patrol car had loosened itself from the parking lot in front of a suburban police station and was following them, flashing its lights, howling its siren.

"Ignore them," Grijpstra said, sucking his cigar. He checked the speedometer. A hundred kilometers an hour. He listened to the scream of tires. He nodded.

"You're nodding," de Gier said. "You usually complain when I drive too fast. Are you changing?"

"Everything changes," shouted Grijpstra. He had to shout because the patrol car was now riding next to them.

De Gier braked.

"Why?" Grijpstra wondered aloud. The patrol car stopped ahead and two cops tumbled onto the pavement.

"Because their car is brand new and ours is falling apart," de Gier said. "Old cars don't drive very fast. They were cutting me off."

"Ho ho ho!" the cops shouted. "Speeding, dear sir? And failing to stop when followed by a patrol car flashing its lights and howling its siren. Are you blind? Are you deaf?"

De Gier showed his police card. Grijpstra loosened the microphone from under the dashboard and held it up by way of proof.

"Detectives, eh?" the cop on the left said.

"Can we come, too?" asked the cop on the right.

"Something nice?" the cop on the left asked.

"Be our guests," de Gier said, "as long as you don't make so much noise. It's close. Ouborg. Do you happen to know where that may be?"

The patrol car guided the way. The address was in a lane, overshadowed by plane trees, with spacious bungalows on each side. A

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windmill stood behind the trees, artistically cutting the nightsky with its sails.

A lady came running toward them, waving her arms.

"I don't think that's legal," one of the cops said a little later.

"That's breaking and entering," the other cop said, "you need a permit, signed by a commissaris."

"The hell," de Gier said, hammering on a window with the butt of his gun. "I've looked through the side window and I've seen a lady on a bed. She has no clothes on and she's bleeding from the head."

"That won't work," Grijpstra said, "the new gun is mostly made of light plastic. It won't break glass. Use this rock."

"Jane," Grijpstra said.

"I beg your pardon?" asked de Gier.

"She looks like Jane," Grijpstra said. "Very much like Jane, and she's dead. Sit down, Sergeant, you always faint when in the presence of a corpse. Ah, it's suicide, see? She's still holding the gun. There's a glass. She had a drink first and then she shot herself through the temple. But why is she naked?"

"Can I phone?" one of the policemen asked. "I know Headquarters' secret number."

The other cop wandered about the room. "Posh," he commented. "That painting is by Edward Hopper, a famous American, worth a year's wages—two maybe. Look at the books. The collected works of a number of geniuses, at fifty guilders a volume. What would that antique couch cost?"

"The house alone costs a million," Grijpstra said. "Yes? What is it, Sergeant?"

De Gier stood in the open door to the garden, nicely silhouetted against the dark clear sky, flanked by small poplars. He was a tall man, narrow-waisted, wide-shouldered. His mustache was modeled on those of high-ranking cavalry officers a hundred years back. His eyes were large, brown, softly pleading. His cheekbones were pronounced, his hair thick and curly. He looked good in the open garden door until he staggered and grabbed a post.

"Don't look at the lady," Grijpstra said. She had been attractive but she was bleeding now and her eyes sort of stared. "Did you see anything worth noting?"

"Yes," de Gier said. "There's a car in the garage and it's burned

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out. It was a Camaro, I think, or a Corvette, resembling a fish of prey. Chevrolet makes those cars, for the rich and happy people."

"So what do we know?" Grijpstra asked three hours later in the car on the way back to the inner city, driving quietly through empty streets, silent but for the chirruping of birds and the squeak of a paperboy's roller skates.

"That the lady is dead," de Gier said, "and that the doctor isn't pleased. The fingerprint gentlemen aren't pleased, either." He held up a finger. "The doctor seems to think she was drugged." He held up a second finger. "The fingerprint gentlemen checked her hand. They think she didn't fire the gun. If she had, the porridge they smeared on her palm would have discolored—because of the fumes of the exploding cartridge, mixed with her sweat and the oil of the gun."

"Modern methods," Grijpstra said unhappily. Grijpstra was an older man, in a forbidding three-piece dark-blue suit softened a little by thin white stripes.

"Adjutant," de Gier said, "we do have modern methods and they're sometimes known to work. If the corpse didn't kill herself, then somebody else did. The murderer shot her and took her hand afterward and inserted the gun."

"Why did she take her clothes off?" Grijpstra asked. "Did she make love to the killer? The doctor wasn't sure."

"He used modern methods, too, our killer," de Gier mused, "and then he drove away in his silver-shaded car. But we have found that the lady's lover is also the owner of the house. He's a man by the name of Wever and he doesn't drive a silver car. He hasn't been home for a few days. And we know the lady's name, which is Cora Fischer."

"Drive on," Grijpstra said. "I don't want to go to Headquarters. The building is bleak at this time of the early morning."

"Where would sir like to be driven to?"

"To an all-night café on a picturesque canal where we can drink gin and beer and smoke black cigars. If we get drunk we'll leave the car and stagger home."

"Right," de Gier said. "Here's your beer and here's your gin and here's my coffee."

"Is there cognac in your coffee?" Grijpstra asked. "What a lovely café this is. Behold the heavy rotten beams supporting a smoky

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ceiling. Take a look at that criminal-looking bartender and that small crowd of hopeless alcoholics. Isn't Amsterdam a beautiful city?"

"There's cognac in my coffee," de Gier said. "Let me wish you good health. Cora Fischer. First she was loved and later killed. This is a choice crime and I'm glad I work for the police. And you know, she looked rather relaxed. I hardly think there was a fight. Was she drugged or not?"

"I'm not quite sure," the pathologist said some six hours later. "Sit down over there, Sergeant. The autopsy will supply us with tangible information. I haven't seen you here before. Are you sure you can take it? I'll have to cut and saw."

"He can't take it," Grijpstra said, "and I don't think I can either, but the law says there should be some officer of the law here to watch you. But the inspector is otherwise engaged and the commissaris has been told to rest in the morning. Please go ahead."

"I'm going out for a walk," said de Gier. "It's a nice day and I hardly ever visit cemeteries. I'll walk about for a while and study flower arrangements on tombstones. I'll be back when you're done."

Grijpstra watched how the pathologist, in a white coat and a plastic apron, made the incision: two long cuts from the shoulders to the navel and a shorter one from the lower belly to the pubic area. Another doctor, a clone of the first, cut the headskin in order to bare the skull. The one doctor cut while the other sawed, with an electric gadget that sprayed sawdust against his mask. Why don't I rather think something? Grijpstra thought. This is not appetizing. They are damaging her, as if she isn't damaged enough already.

The lady's consort, Grijpstra thought, is called Wever, and he owns the villa, worth a million, which is about as much as I can make in twenty years. The man is extraordinarily wealthy, although he isn't an attorney, or a dentist, or even a registered accountant. He's rich because he owns illegal gambling houses and a drugs-and-sex joint in the fashionable little seaport of Noordwijk close by. His name is known to us but we haven't been able to arrest him so far. He doesn't pay taxes because he fiddles his books. He's a gangster, an evil spirit from the underworld. With the old police gun we couldn't shoot him because the bullets would have been stopped in his fat. With the new gun we could kill him easily but we don't because that would be illegal. He's known to us because our secret detectives visit brothels and are equipped with large ears. We've heard that about a year

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ago he took a new mistress, a certain Cora Fischer, the ex-model of a famous painter, the ex-star of the art-loving society.

The pathologists handled their knives like indifferent but knowledgable butchers. As they cleaned the parts taken from the body with fresh water bubbling from a handshower and dumped them in dishes and bottles, one of them spoke in a loud monotonous voice, reporting his observations to a clerk, positioned at a safe distance. "Liver," the pathologist said, "slightly enlarged and discolored." He weighed the liver and announced the figure. The clerk wrote the figure down.

Where was I? Grijpstra thought. Right. Cora impressed the arty and the affluent. But the famous painter tired of her and removed her from his turn-of-the-century loft. She was without employ but she was still attractive. Wever welcomed her and Cora became the hostess of his club in Noordwijk and sometimes in his llegal black-jack joints. Or so said the secret detectives who lived in the underworld and whispered through telephones and slipped letters under Headquarters' doors.

"Well?" Grijpstra asked.

"We still can't be sure," the second pathologist said. "We'll have to do some tests. She didn't inject, that's for sure, but she did sniff cocaine. She drank a bit too much and she smoked."

"Can I smoke?" Grijpstra asked.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"I think I will all the same," Grijpstra said. "This is a good cigar and I'm a bit nervous."

"I'll open a window," the man said, doing it and adding, "Smoking can kill you, you know."

"Is that right?" Grijpstra said. "So what killed her?"

The doctor smiled. "A bullet through the head. No doubt about it. And her vanity. She was a lovely dame."

"Well?" de Gier asked.

"They're still not sure," Grijpstra said, "but there was alcohol in her stomach, mixed with a sleeping draught. It's very pleasant out here."

"I saw three thrushes," de Gier said, "and a crow. Some chickadees too and a magpie. Some of the tombstones carry impressive poetry. And I saw a gent with a motor helmet under his arm hiding behind sunglasses. He must have been a boxer, in view of his flattened nose,

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and is still a sporting type, in view of his bouncy gait. Look, there he is, riding away on a four-cylinder motorcycle."

Grijpstra looked. "That's a very large gent. Six foot six, I would think. What was he doing here?"

"I'm beginning to think I know," de Gier said. "He looked at me for quite a while with much interest. —Does she still look like Jane?"

"*Mister* Wever," de Gier said four hours later, "listen, and listen good. There are some facts. One of the facts is that your reputation stinks. Your gambling joints and your brothel are no good. You're a pimp and a drug dealer."

"Facts," Wever said, sitting uncomfortably on a straight-backed chair in Grijpstra's office, holding his hands on his knees so that the middle fingers rested on the immaculate creases of his tailor-made sharkskin pants, "should be proved. You've never proved anything regarding me. You haven't done that because no drugs have ever been found in the establishments I own. So what's all this empty talk, eh?"

"I'm telling you," de Gier said, "that you're a curse on our society. There's another fact." The sergeant held up a finger. "Your girl friend was murdered—in your house, on your bed."

Wever showed the gold stuck in his whitish gums. "So what?"

De Gier said, "She didn't shoot herself—our modern methods say so."

Grijpstra nodded. "And someone had mixed a sleeping pill into her drink."

Wever adjusted his hairpiece. "So you claim. But why should I believe you? Why should the judge believe you? So Cora took a tranquilizer—she often did, she was a highstrung woman, you know. She worried a lot, whether I loved her or if I didn't. And I didn't, of course, because I have this other lady, in my club in Noordwijk, who is younger and more appetizing. I was spending nights with Yvette, so Cora shot herself."

De Gier had become angry. He was hitting his desk top wth the flat of his hand. "And burned her own car? No, sir, *you* burned her car and later you had her killed. Now listen to me—"

"But what if I don't want to listen to you?" Wever asked. "You're impolite and I'm a gentleman of sorts. I wasn't home. Alibi, don't you know? Are you familiar with the word? She shot herself." Wever got up. He was a big man, he kept getting up.

"Sit down, Mister Pimp," de Gier said. "If you leave this office

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you'll be arrested in the corridor, for not paying traffic tickets. And we'll close your joints."

Wever sat down. "What's wrong wth my gambling? Blackjack's okay. The court says so and the Supreme Court is about to confirm it. Blackjack has to be played with intelligence, that's why you could never play it. I wasn't home, I can prove I wasn't home. It wasn't me."

Grijpstra looked up. "Can't you conjugate verbs correctly? Can't you do anything right?"

Wever got angry too. Sweat trickled down his cheeks, on its way to his many chins.

"What happened was this," de Gier said. "First you were proud of Cora. Because she was so lovely, and so famous. You put her in your palace and she was the queen in your club—people pointed her out to each other. You bought her a car worth forty thousand. Clothes. Jewelry. She was a nouveauté. But after a while she wasn't any more. But she was still around, costing money. You're a businessman in a way and like balancing things out. If you lose money you have to gain it back again. So—"

Wever put up his hands. Sunlight reflected from his varnished nails. "That's enough."

"Not at all," de Gier said. "We're after the truth. So what was Cora left to do? She had to smuggle dope. The Camaro nosed into Paris and back again, once a week. Cora carried cocaine and heroin in her pants, in her cleavage. She slipped easily back and forth through the checkpoints, the customs smiling at her. But then she wouldn't go any more."

"No?" Wever asked. "Changed her mind, did she? Whatever for?"

"Let's not be funny," de Gier said. "She stopped smuggling your drugs because she realized drugs are bad for people. Cora was never a bad girl. You made her bad but she wanted to be good again."

Wever sighed. "*Good?* That phony hysterical broad?"

De Gier stirred his coffee. The room became quiet.

"Hello?" Grijpstra asked.

"Yes," de Gier said. "Then you destroyed her car a few nights back. The fire department came but they couldn't save the Camaro—that classy car she liked so much, gone forever. Insured, but that didn't help her since you weren't planning on replacing it. But you did talk to her."

"Right," Wever said softly. "Suppose, as long as we're playing this game together, that what you say is true. It isn't, but okay. Even

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if it were true, you can't prove I killed her. You can't because I didn't kill her. I wasn't home."

"*You* weren't," de Gier said, "but you sent your right hand—a gent by the name of Freddie. A big gent—bigger than you, but with a good build. You're horribly fat, you know. Freddie isn't, but he does have a fat head, and the chips in it aren't very complicated. Kill, you say, and Freddie kills. He gets into a silver car and shoots the lady. He also drives a motorbike, by the way."

"I'm going," Wever said. "You're not only wasting my time, you're spoiling it. I'll pay my traffic tickets on the way down. Goodbye."

"You weren't really angry?" Grijpstra asked.

"*He* was," de Gier said.

"Yes," Grijpstra agreed. "And I believe you're right. I don't particularly care for bluffing, but we sometimes have to do it. How could you know that Freddie is the motorbike rider."

De Gier shrugged. "I sensed evil in the man and checked our files. The secret branch sent in a snapshot of him once. We've got nothing on him, but we know he works for Wever. He doesn't go to cemeteries because he likes watching tombs. He's an artist in a way. He follows up on his work. Or maybe he's horribly crazy. Perhaps this was a special job for him, because Cora was such a beautiful woman. She was naked, remember? He had her, then he killed her. He felt a link that pulled him right to the cemetery—to me, the avenger. I'm an angel of light, he's a demon of darkness."

"A far-fetched conclusion."

"Wasn't I right?" de Gier said. "Didn't you say so just now?"

Grijpstra murdered his half-smoked cigar with a spark-whirling stump in the ashtray. "I never went in for mysticism. It doesn't get anybody anywhere. You were right, certainly, but we're where we've been so often—nowhere. Wever wasn't home, he really wasn't. And Freddie will say that he wasn't in Ouborg, either. There'll be witnesses in Noordwijk claiming that they were playing cards with him all night. And the silver-shaded car was borrowed for the occasion, or stolen, or the license plates weren't right. No."

"Coffee and cake?" de Gier asked.

"Hello, Jane," he said in the canteen.

"Can I join you?" the female officer asked.

Grijpstra jumped up. De Gier fetched a chair. "You know," he said, "it wasn't wrong what I did. I got him rattled. I made waves in his

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soul. Didn't Newton say that action gives reaction? I made him angry. Wever has lost his cool—he's got to slip up now."

"What are you two talking about?" Jane asked. "Don't I get any coffee and cake?"

"You're a sweetheart," de Gier said. "You're actually asking. Feminists get their own coffee. You're a real woman and a beautiful woman too. I can hardly believe your beauty. You instill tender and protective feelings in my deepest mind."

"The sergeant," Grijpstra said, "likes to work on people's feelings."

"I love it," Jane said. She pushed back her chair and crossed her legs.

"You have good legs," Grijpstra said. "It's a pity I never paint human figures. If I did, I'd ask you to model for me."

"Model," de Gier said, returning with Jane's coffee. "Cora was a model. It seems that the universe is unlimited in its manifestations, but deeper reflection might show that everything is a variation on a single theme."

"What was that?" Jane asked.

"The sergeant likes to ramble," Grijpstra said.

Four hours later de Gier's apartment buzzer buzzed. The sergeant put his cat on the floor, placed his book on the table, and opened the door.

"Evening," his visitor said. "My name is Freddie."

Freddie sat down. The cat jumped from the chair.

"My cat was sitting there," de Gier said.

"Stupid cat."

"Yes?"

"Listen here," Freddie said. "I've come to bring you money. Here you are." He put an envelope on de Gier's book.

"What's in that?"

"Ten thousand. There'll be more later, but then we will require your services. This is a present. You don't even have to *not* do something because you can't do anything anyway. You have no proof."

"You're not providing me with news," de Gier said.

"You're fuzz," Freddie said, "and fuzz is for sale. Because you're good fuzz, I bring you money straightaway. The fuzz we have so far is little fuzz. They're okay for a bit of information now and then, like so that we won't be there when you're preparing a raid. But it would be nice to have some big fuzz on the payroll, too."

"Yes?"

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"Yes?"

De Gier lit a cigarette.

"You're not offering anything?" Freddie asked.

"No," de Gier said. "You're unwelcome company. Maybe I don't want your money, either. Maybe I'll shoot you in a minute or so. I don't want to fight you. This is a small apartment and we'll break the furniture."

"Once we start fighting," Freddie said, "I'll break you, too. The boss has lost his temper. You've been rude to him. The boss likes people to be polite and helpful. So he's not giving you a choice. You've got to work for us and you've got to take our money. If you refuse, we'll be nasty."

"Like what?" de Gier asked.

The cat walked past Freddie's leg. Freddie picked up the cat and turned it over. He slid a stiletto from his pocket. The point of the stiletto scratched the cat's chin. The cat purred. "Stupid cat," Freddie said. "I can open him up, like they opened up Cora today. But I won't sew him up again. I'll leave him here, open."

"Maybe you shouldn't do that," de Gier said.

Freddie pushed the cat from his lap. "Not yet, but I might later on if you happen to be disobedient. I'll kill your cat and your old mother and anybody else you care for. If I happen to be busy, someone else will do it. The boss is rich, unbelievably rich. He can buy anybody. And whoever he buys makes more money for him."

"Yes?"

Freddie grinned, slowly and completely. "Cocaine and heroin prices are going up again, but our cost price drops. And the customers carry the money in without the slightest prodding. There's no end to it. Money is good. It buys good cars and good trips. Look at my color."

"Nice tan," de Gier acknowledged.

"Bermuda. I was there last week. I'll go again. I've been in the Seychelles too and in Indonesia. You can make nice trips too. You can use this money."

"Not a bad idea."

"I'm glad you agree." Freddie got up.

"Goodbye," de Gier said and closed the door behind Freddie. He waited until he heard the elevator going down and sprinted down the staircase. He was outside before Freddie got out of the elevator.

"Psst," de Gier said.

Freddie approached him with his legs astride and his fists up.

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"Not here," de Gier said. "We don't want to make a spectacle of ourselves. Over there, in the park."

"You can't be serious," Freddie said.

They crossed the street together. It was late. The sky carried few clouds. The moon caused delicate shades on the lawns. Ducks in the pond woke for a moment and murmured sleepily. A swan bobbed, stirred by one foot. De Gier walked next to Freddie, his hand on his back. De Gier was tall but he wasn't a giant. He exercised regularly, one evening a week, sometimes two. He had a black belt in judo.

Freddie was a giant. He also exercised regularly and he had a high grade in karate. He could split bricks. Freddie drank heavily, de Gier moderately. They both smoked.

"I'll take you apart," Freddie said. "But not altogether. The boss likes things to develop slowly. He warns first."

De Gier smiled. They passed a tree and a thrush opened an eye and tried a slow trill.

"What's funny?" Freddie asked.

"That I don't give warning," de Gier said. He kicked and hit simultaneously. His foot hit Freddie's shin and his hand made contact with his bellybutton. Freddie almost fell. De Gier half circled him and extended an arm, holding his waist in a friendly manner. He shuffled back until his feet touched Freddie's, then he swung swiftly.

"Hey," Freddie shouted as he fell.

"Here you are," de Gier said and closed Freddie's eyes with his fist. Then he hit him on the chin.

"Yes?" the lady in charge of ambulance movements asked.

"In the Southern Park," de Gier said, "just north of the larger pond, there's a man on the gravel. He's been knocked down and he's unconscious."

"Did you phone the police?"

De Gier replaced the hook. "No," he said to the quiet telephone. "They know my voice."

He picked up the phone again.

"Yes?" Constable First-Class Simon Cardozo, temporarily attached to the Criminal Investigation Department of the Amsterdam Municipal Police, asked.

"Listen," de Gier said. "My cat has been threatened."

"Tabriz?" asked Cardozo.

"I have only one cat. Can she stay with you?"

"Long?" Cardozo asked.

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"I'll bring her over now."

"I'll fetch her," Cardozo said. "You don't have a car. Give me five minutes."

A burglar cycled into the suburb Ouborg, about two hours later. The burglar broke into the mansion where Cora Fischer had lived such a luxurious life. Nobody was home and the burglar found a suitcase and filled it with clothes and jewelry. He cycled away again and was spotted by a patrol car. The car didn't stop.

"Three o'clock in the morning?" the constable next to the driver asked. "A cyclist with a suitcase?"

"His lights were in order," the driving constable said. "You don't see that very often. A cyclist with working lights is okay."

"Well, what do you know?" Wever said about nineteen hours later. "Bit of a fool, aren't you, Sergeant? Do you know that Freddie has been admitted to the hospital?"

De Gier sat on a low leather chair. He drank beer. "Nice place you've got here, but too expensive I would think."

"Join us," Grijpstra said. "You interfere with my view of the musicians."

Wever sat down. He cracked his fingers. A girl brought drinks. She was a nice-looking girl in a mini skirt and on high heels. She wasn't wearing anything else. "To think," Grijpstra said, "that Noordwijk was a rustic little port once and that there were sailors and fishermen in the cafés, smoking stone pipes from their beards. To think," Grijpstra said dreamily, "that their wives and girl friends wore blue-calico underwear right down to the knees."

"Listen," Wever said, "Freddie tells me he forgot an envelope in the sergeant's apartment."

"One of the reasons of our visit," de Gier said and put the envelope on the table. Wever picked it up. A combo consisting of a pianist, a drummer, and a bass player played a European version of "This Here."

"Is your paneling of rosewood?" Grijpstra asked.

Gier observed the suspect. He saw that he had a soft face, not soft from sensitive but soft from weak. He has been doing too well for too long, de Gier thought. His spine is dissolving. He was a tough guy once but now his muscles are yellow fat.

"Don't get up," de Gier said.

Wever's big fingers, flashing with diamonds, clamped on the sides

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of his chair. His buttocks were off his cushion. "Why not? This is my place—I can do what I like."

"You're under arrest." De Gier sat. "Drop down."

Wever's body flopped back onto the cushion. "Arrest for what?"

"For serious suspicions. I suspect that you're dealing in drugs, that you make money out of prostitution, and that you allow your customers to engage in illegal gambling."

Wever's cheeks rippled. He gestured. Grijpstra watched the moist spots on the armrests of Wever's chair.

"Are you crazy?" Wever asked. "This is today. Today anything goes. What's wrong with keeping whores? I have a sex club here, not a brothel. Brothels are out. And so is the law!" He looked about him. He pointed at guests. "And why did you bring all these cops? Do you think I can't smell cops even when they dress up like real people?" He began to get up again.

"Down, boy," Grijpstra said. "Didn't the sergeant just tell you that you're under arrest?"

"I've got to go to the restroom."

"Need a sniff, do you?" Grijpstra said. "That won't help you now. Those days are gone. You've done too much. You even tried to bribe my colleague."

"Why not?" Wever asked. "Aren't you all corrupt these days? Even a commissaris can be bought. Corruption has become a way of life."

"Not quite," Grijpstra said. "The ten thou is back in your pocket. Cat-threatening is bad, too—we'll have you for that as well."

"And," de Gier said, "you had your girl friend killed. That's really going too far."

"Proof?" Wever asked.

"Quiet," de Gier said. "That piano player is good. Let me listen for a while. I'd like another drink, too. —Miss?"

Wever didn't look happy, but the general atmosphere improved. The topless waitress brought drinks, and more later. Wever was allowed a visit to the restroom under Grijpstra's supervision. The adjutant frisked his suspect and confiscated one gram of cocaine and a stiletto. The combo, encouraged by applause from the plainclothesmen and the other guests, improved. The pianist played meticulously, although he increased his speed. The drummer was also a percussionist, doing well on cowbells and wooden gongs. The bass remained steady, providing a strong drive.

"Some flute maybe?" Grijpstra asked.

De Gier produced a piccolo from his inside pocket, deftly joining

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its parts. He got up and repeated the main theme of the song. The audience cheered. De Gier tried an arpeggio, then improvised freely. The combo adjusted easily.

Grijpstra studied Wever. He's afraid, Grijpstra thought. Things are going well. De Gier has set up the scene properly and we're getting close. But now—but now—

The moment came. The revolving door introduced a tall but slender woman, a lady in the full glory of her beauty. Her hair had been elaborately arranged. She was dressed charmingly in a linen gown handpainted with Chinese designs. Jewels bedecked her hands and neck. She sat down in the rear of the establishment.

De Gier still played his flute, encouraged by the musicians and the audience. Grijpstra waited. Wever looked about. He finally saw the woman. The light was dim—he could see the lady's general appearance but no fine details. "Cora," he whispered.

De Gier bowed and put his flute down. Grijpstra sucked on his cigar. He waved with his free hand. A young man, with unruly curly hair and dressed in a threadbare corduroy suit, got up and walked toward him. "Cardozo," Grijpstra said, "it's time." He produced a document, unfolded it, and handed it to Wever. "This is our permit to search the premises. You stay here."

Wever sweated, cursed, and muttered four-letter words.

Grijpstra waved again. Two men jumped up. "Sit here," Grijpstra told them, "and make sure the suspect doesn't move."

He and de Gier left the table as the two men sat down.

"You know," de Gier said a quarter of an hour later, "if we don't find anything, we've wasted our time."

"No negativity now," Grijpstra said. "We found the roulette, didn't we? Roulette is illegal. We have a charge."

"Nah," de Gier said. "The roulette wasn't being used. He'll provide some excuse. He can afford the best lawyers. Even the corruption charge won't stick. I want him for heroin—and murder, of course."

They were in a large room, leaning against exotic wainscoting, their hands in their pockets, their chins on their chests. Plainclothes cops wandered about, picking up objects and putting them down again. "Adjutant?" Cardozo asked.

"Constable First-Class?" Grijpstra asked.

"Look," Cardozo said, pointing at an oak shelf above the open fire.

"I noticed it," Grijpstra said. "That's a small statue of a reclining eastern goddess. We've seen the type before. They're hollow and

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contain heroin when they cross the border, but by the time we see them they're always empty."

"They're always hollow," Cardozo agreed, "but that one is solid."

De Gier walked over and picked up the statuette. He showed it to the adjutant. "Cardozo is right—it's solid."

"Exactly the same type as the ones we've found before," Cardozo said, "in Chinese restaurants and junk stores and so forth. They've always been hollow but we've found traces of heroin inside. This one is solid." He weighed it on his hand. "A little over two pounds, I would say."

"Odd," said de Gier, scratching the statue.

"Careful," said Cardozo, "I tried that, too. The stuff flakes easily."

"Gypsum doesn't flake so easily," Grijpstra said.

"It isn't gypsum," Cardozo said.

"If you're right," de Gier said, "you have a fortune in your hands. A million maybe—on street level, that is."

"I am right," Cardozo said. "And we are in a retail outlet."

Grijpstra whistled—and the room filled up with cops.

"The treasure has been found," Grijpstra said. "Have all employees arrested and have extra staff alerted at Headquarters."

"The suspect downstairs," one of the men said, "seems to be suffering a mental breakdown. He's accusing himself of murder, committed on a certain Cora Fischer, and keeps pointing at our Jane."

Sergeant de Gier, about ten hours later, admitted that the course he had taken, and subsequently helped to direct, could be defined as irregular. He made his statement in the commissaris' office. The commissaris was facing him from behind his imposing desk. Grijpstra stood near the window, admiring a geranium in bloom.

"Yes," the commissaris said, "but that fellow Freddie had been threatening your cat, which is an extenuating circumstance. The results are excellent, fortunately. I hear that Wever is not retracting his confession."

"Freddie has confessed, too," Grijpstra told the geranium. "It seems that he's been under some stress which has weakened his nerves. He also objects to being called the murder weapon by his boss."

"Your cat is not too disgruntled?" the commissaris asked.

"She's doing well, sir," de Gier said. "Cardozo took good care of her and she's home again."

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Em was a character. Disasters clustered round him like flies, but his stock dismissive phrase was, "You had to laugh . . ."

Although this is only Jeffry Scott's fourteenth story in EQMM, *he has published over 150 stories and is a full-time journalist with the London* Daily Mail *with any number of dramatic overseas assignments to his credit. Asked in a recent EQ Mystery Newsletter interview how he found the time to do both, he said, "One always finds time for love affairs or obsessions. It never occurred to me that 'the writer' has to have enormous time at set periods. Not knowing any better can be a priceless gift."*

To us, certainly . . .

THE LAUGHTER OF EMMETT GRIGG

by *JEFFRY SCOTT*

My father used to say—usually after a family spat—that one gets landed with relatives, like it or not, whereas friends can be chosen.

Running into Em Grigg once a month or so, and pretty well every week in summer, made me wonder about that. He was always delighted to see me, even if we'd been chewing the fat only a few days previously. His snaggly teeth would flash. He was a great shaker of hands, puncher of shoulders, ruffler of hair.

And we didn't have a thing in common, really. A whole bunch of us grew up together and hung out during high school, but by definition there's a world of difference between kids and grown men.

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Looking at Em Grigg in his uniform of oily jeans and baseball jacket that would have been a better fit on his teenage son, it was hard to remember the time when he had been our idol and leader.

Even in those days he'd been a dreamer. "Maybe I'll go down to Panama this summer—my uncle's in construction, he says I can make big bucks." Em was maybe fourteen at the time, a tall and husky fourteen, but fourteen all the same.

Anse Pollard and Ralphie Drage and a shrimpy kid who was next door to albino, whose name and fate escape me to this day, and the boy who had been me would listen in awe and envy Em as a free-booter and wanderer.

The thing was, Em Grigg did it. Took off without bothering to graduate high school, and while the rest of us hustled through the opening laps of the rat race he was sending the occasional tantalizing postcard from places like Monte Carlo or Katmandu.

"It sure did him a lot of good," Heidi pointed out once. "All that travel in order to get nowhere." My wife is a pragmatic lady. She used to accuse me of reverse snobbery because I was the only one of the old gang willing to spend much time with Em.

Maybe she was right. I'm a victim of modern urban man's sense of inadequacy. My mechanical skills stop at hitting the Yellow Pages when any gadget goes wrong. If I mow front and back yards the same day, my palms blister and I'm a candidate for cardiac arrest.

Emmett Grigg, by contrast, might have looked like a transient trying to find his way back to a Steinbeck novel, but he was super-fit and could turn his hand to anything.

"The noble savage," Heidi suggested ironically. It was during a picnic at Shield Lake. Em spotted us and his brats started playing with our twins. Em's picnic stores were scanty—a bottle of Coke and some chocolate bars—so Heidi resignedly raided our hamper and cooler and treated all the kids to a banquet. Em's wife had followed the family tradition by taking off after their third was born. Unlike her husband, she never sent postcards. There was a persistent town rumor that she was doing very well as a Vegas hooker, but people will say anything. Especially about poor old Em.

You had to admit that his children looked fine. Not an item of their clothing matched nor was new, and their hair needed cutting, their necks could have done with a scrubbing, but they were healthy, well behaved without being prissy, and obviously adored their dad.

Life as a single parent couldn't be easy, I reflected, but at least it would be interesting.

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"So would sliding down Mount Everest on a teatray," Heidi commented tartly when I shared the thought in bed one evening. "Come on, Ted, the man's a happy, irresponsible loser."

"Somebody has to be," I chuckled. "Emmett Grigg is a character, sweetheart. He ought to be supported as a national resource—society gets more regimented and standardized by the year."

The funny part was that while I'd defend Em to her, my true feelings were complex. To be honest, my heart sank a little at the sight of him. A lot of the friendship was nostalgia, stubborn attempts to keep the teenage Em alive—and along with him, my younger, freer, more optimistic self.

The truth was that Emmett could be embarrassing as hell. We all know one person like him—the fellow compelled to top every story, match every experience. It's pointless calling them liars, because for as long as they're talking they believe their fantasies.

It had reached the stage where I dreaded seeing a familiar face—friend or neighbor—who might join us. There was the time Peter Frye gave me a ride to town and we ran into Em at the station. Frye is in advertising and commutes to New York daily. He mentioned his job and Em recollected the spell *he* had done on Madison Avenue—patently untrue and indeed impossible, and the more he talked the worse it got. The train was late, naturally, and he had time to kill, pleased to keep us company until its arrival.

Making it more complicated, every so often Em would spin some whopper and it turned out to be true. No doubt telling so many tall stories and wish-fulfilling versions of his past, some of the claims had to be, by the law of averages.

For instance, he hinted at having worked as a civilian consultant on survival in Southeast Asia after jumping ship in Vietnam when he tired of the Merchant Marine. I mentioned the boast as an example of Em Grigg's Walter Mitty side to a cousin of mine who is a Special Forces buff and Steve placed the name immediately. "Sure, Grigg was there for a month or two."

I never mentioned this to Em, partly because he might have realized I was checking him out, but mainly so as not to encourage his romancing. But I gladly gave him a trace more respect inwardly.

But you never knew where you were with old Em, apart from the fact that he'd be starting or finishing yet another mysterious, nothing job. The reason he turned his hand to *anything* was that he had to. Most of us worked in the city. The kids tied him to the cottage

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his parents had left him. Too beat-up to sell, too cheap to leave, he said—though Belle, his runaway wife, hadn't agreed.

I guess I'm going on about my old friend. But with all his flaws, as I'd wisecracked to Heidi, Em was a character, probably the most interesting person I knew. He was certainly the most optimistic. Disasters clustered round him like flies, but his stock dismissive phrase was, "You had to laugh."

Belle ditching him rated: "She vamoosed on our wedding anniversary. Could have been by chance. I was late home that night on account of selling the pickup to buy her a ring. Trying to patch things up. You had to laugh."

Or his broken nose: "Been in all kinds of brawls and go-rounds, never got a scratch. Well, scratches and bruises. But then I step on this rake, the handle comes up, smacks me in the face, and decks me. You had to laugh."

The odd part was that you'd rarely hear Emmett laugh. He'd grin easily enough, it was almost a permanent expression, but his eyes stayed sad and the lines on his face suggested that the happy signal was some sort of mask.

Em was beaming to beat the band that night in the Star Diner. It's a place near the station where I stop for one or three Buds on a Friday evening. I've never seen anyone eating there. It was Em's second home, they took phone messages for him and he called it "the office."

Ralphie Drage happened to catch the same train from the city and went in with me—after an argument. "Come on, Ted," he said, "I'm too old to go slumming. Let's hit the lounge at the Garrett House, it's only a block farther to walk." Lighting a cigar, he gave me his Roman-emperor squint down the fragrant length of it. "I'm sick of Em Grigg's lies, if you want to know."

Well, that was what he said, but I knew he secretly liked the idea of seeing Em. For some reason they'd been on the prod with each other for years.

I'm a creature of habit, and the Star is where I unwind on TGIF. "He may not be there, Ralphie," I urged.

But he was, and delighted to see us.

"For a poor man, you look pretty full of yourself," Ralphie said sourly.

"Got a girl," Em told us. "Darndest thing, I'm helping a guy fix the heating system at a condo over to Journyville. He gave me a

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key but I managed to walk into the wrong apartment. That's how I met Carol. You've got to laugh."

For the next half hour he told us more about Carol than we needed or wanted to know. Dynamite personality, great bod, kind, sweet. It was as good as a play, Ralphie Drage trying to change the subject or half openly doubting whether she existed, and Em prattling on and on.

"You'll have to introduce us," Ralphie said, winking at me. Not even Emmett Grigg could drink beer and talk at the same time, and Ralphie had been bursting to speak.

"No sweat," Em agreed, wiping his chin. "Here she comes."

We stood up awkwardly as the girl slipped into the booth beside Em and dabbed a kiss on his cheek. It was another case of an Em tale being no less than the truth. Oh, Carol wasn't spectacular, but she was warmly attractive and plain *nice*. I'd have babbled over her if she'd been mine.

Walking to my car, still in the station park, Ralphie muttered, "It isn't fair. A derelict like Em Grigg putting the moves on a decent girl like her."

"Hey, derelict is way over the top. Em pays his way."

"Huh! Not always with his own money, I hear!"

Shrugging, I said drily, "You're the expert on moves, Ralphie. Right from school, I seem to remember. Em was always the faithful type—one at a time, anyway."

Ralphie went red. "Now listen here, I'm surprised at you giving credit to gossip, Ted. Sure, I passed the time of day with Belle—me and a dozen other men around here. *I* didn't break up their marriage."

"Wow." Forgetting the car key, I stared at him until he looked down and began shifting from foot to foot. "Ralphie, I had no idea. You and Belle?"

After a short battle, smugness and spite beat sheepishness. "You didn't know? Sure. While our friend was playing Peter Pan, I kept ol' Belle happy. The things she told me about that character—"

"I'd rather not hear it, thanks." I opened the car doors. " 'Fess up, Ralphie, how much of that affair was sexual attraction and how much of it was getting even with Emmett?"

He was taken aback. "You're weird, Ted. Belle was up for grabs, and I took advantage of a foxy lady's friendly nature. What kind of world do you live in? I don't need to get even with Grigg, I'm way, *way* ahead in every department!"

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"But you don't like him."

Ralphie guffawed and shook his head. "What's to like? The man's an adult school-kid who doesn't know the difference between fairy tales and reality. Full of what makes the grass grow, Ted—and people still like the guy!"

That was why Ralphie couldn't stand him! I'd known, unconsciously, right along. Scenes zipped through my mind: Ralphie with his first car, brand new, wanting to take us riding, but Em had borrowed or stolen a .22 varmint rifle and took us hunting instead. Ralphie heading the class in everything except popularity, Em the dunce still making the teachers laugh and forgive him.

"Drop me here, my car's on that corner." Ralphie didn't get out for a while. He was brooding at the windshield. "She's too good for him," he said abruptly. There was no doubt who he meant.

"Leave it, you've taken one woman off him. Em's easygoing but—"

"He's a fool."

"Whichever, his good nature can't be limitless. Anyway, from the look of her, she'll be with another guy by next week," I lied.

Lumbering away, Ralphie called back, "Right, and it'll be me." He was wrong, but only over the time scale.

For the first few months, Emmett seemed to have struck lucky. Carol was a registered nurse who'd come to town to tend an ailing relative. When the aunt recovered, Carol got a part-time job at a nursing home and moved into Em's cottage. She'd always wanted children; Em's three took to her and of course their father was besotted with her.

Even Heidi was cautiously approving. She liked Carol—Em brought her over for dinner one evening—and was amazed at the way Em had been coaxed into a suit and tie for the occasion.

"Don't say it," she pleaded, when they'd left and I was helping her stack the dishwasher. "Em's got to get *something* right after a lifetime of failure. It must be his turn, is all I can imagine."

Em still took a drink at the Star from time to time. One Friday I was there when he came out with a typical Emmett Grigg anecdote. Somebody mentioned Watergate and the talk had meandered toward dirty tricks in general.

"You know I do, um, special haulage work from time to time," he started. Willie Corner, who runs the garden center, groaned under his breath and a couple of members of the informal circle muttered

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something about checking the jukebox. I felt uncomfortable, no novelty around Em.

Unaware of the reaction, he said, "You could put it that I've got connections with, uh, the intelligence community. They need an errand boy they can trust, they call on me."

"Because of your discretion," Alan Hinds suggested. He's the pharmacist, baby-faced and innocent although he's a grandfather. Al can get away with that kind of remark.

"Right," said Em, without losing a beat. "Anyway, I get an air ticket to Denver—it was that time I went missing for a week back in the fall—and an address that turns out to be a garage.

"I get there and show my ID. They even had one of those gadgets where you press your hand on a machine and it reads your palm print. I get handed the keys to a pickup truck—an ordinary Chevy, not old, not new—with four big cartons in back under a tarp."

Despite ourselves, we were leaning forward a fraction, listening even as we disbelieved.

"I drive the stuff to—well, somewhere that takes a long time to reach. This mad-scientist character signs the papers and then he opens a carton and takes out this aerosol can. It could be furniture polish, windscreen-deicing gunk, anything. A plain white can, put it on the supermarket shelf and it'd be right at home, if you get my drift."

Em broke off, chugged some Bud, and pretended that was the story.

"All right, hit me," Willie Corner snapped. "What was it, antigravity paint, invisibility spray, what?"

Em shook his head painedly. "Come on, guys, would I expect you to believe crazy stuff like that?" Al Hinds winked at us, opened his mouth, and then mimed second thoughts about answering.

"It was like tear gas, only it doesn't make you cry," Em informed us solemnly. "It just puts you to sleep. I don't mean it knocks you out—I mean you feel drowsy, you got to sit down or better yet lie down. Ten minutes later you wake up, feeling fine, nice nap."

Sensing skepticism, his voice rose. "It's true! When the old bird told me, *I* didn't believe him, so he gave me a zap from the can and I yawned and sat down—and suddenly it's ten minutes later."

"Not eleven minutes? Not nine?" Al Hinds inquired.

Em's grin turned into a straight compressed line. "Okay, I just know what he showed me. As a matter of fact, he did it twice. It worked on the dog, too. There were guard dogs, see. He squirted one

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of them and it hunkered down and went to sleep, *bam.*" Em never stayed mad for long. Plaintively he added, "It smells like—oh, I guess peaches."

Willie Corner spluttered. Al turned away and stared out of the window.

"I don't know what they wanted that stuff for," Em mused, "but you could cause havoc with it. Or knock out guards or a night watchman and they'd never understand what happened. They'd just think they'd goofed off and taken a few zees. Dangerous stuff. You could pull the perfect murder . . ."

That was too much for Al. "How? *Sleep* your victim to death?" Suddenly the laughter was open and Em, getting the message, started talking about football.

Em's tale sticks in my mind because of the way things fell out. I didn't see Em for several months after hearing it, but he must have spun a hundred more meanwhile—it was pretty restrained by his standards—so Al and Willie and old Dedrickson who keeps bar at the Star would long since have forgotten it.

It wasn't that I avoided Emmett—there were just too many other things that mattered more. Heidi fell ill and didn't get better for a worryingly long time. (It turned out to be an allergy. Allergies were hardly *invented* when I was in short pants and now they rule us.) Then there was the trouble at the company, with insipid, boring Ms. Weekes emerging as an embezzler who'd been gambling ten thousand dollars a week on the nags. It meant a lot of pressure on me. I wasn't suspected, but I was put in charge of de-screwing things up. And Ms. Weekes had been an ingenious lady, in spades.

The result was that from April to October, if the Russians had landed in town or the San Andreas Fault had suddenly extended to Shield Lake I'd probably have been only dimly aware of it.

Then Ralphie Drage was killed in an auto accident.

Everyone assumed he must have been high at the time, but the coroner found otherwise.

From the top of Shooters Hill, where they put the stop-light last year, the highway goes straight down like a giant chute. Ralphie went barreling down in his new Cadillac—a got-it-and-flaunt-it man to the end—and failed to make the curve at the bottom. If the drop from shoulder to shore hadn't killed him, then half a day at the

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bottom of Shield Lake, where the car settled when it stopped careening off boulders, most certainly would have.

We sent flowers—Heidi was too weak to attend the funeral and, shamefully, I was too busy. The paper carried three long columns of biography and eulogy, and I daresay many parents of eligible daughters and husbands of restless wives slept easier at night.

It must have been toward Christmas that I took the short cut through the Pastures, leading me past Em's cottage. The sight made me slow down and then back up. Carol's carefully planted garden was a jungle and the place was strangely piebald. Some shutters gleamed with fresh yellow gloss paint, others were the original sadly weathered grey. One was half finished and then abandoned in midbrushstroke.

I recollected her jokingly bullying Em when they'd visited with us, threatening to paint the house herself unless he got around to it.

That night I said, "You never told me Em and Carol had split up."

Heidi looked at me over her glasses. "You never asked. You had more than enough on your mind without me dragging in Peyton Place." That's her jargon for the hatched, matched, and despatched chronicle of small-town doings, not to mention swappings, feuds, and scandals.

"It's a shame. Poor old Em."

She nodded thoughtfully. "Mmm. I doubt whether Carol's wild with joy, either. Emmett Grigg's no prize package, but he was devoted to her and that counts for a lot. I suppose the work got too much for her. It's one thing to yearn for children and another to run around after three little monsters and hold down a part-time job."

Closing the library book on her forefinger to keep the place, she pulled a face. "Now she's fallen between two stools. Swept out of Em's household to start a new life with her wealthy lover, and wham—no lover, either."

"Wealthy lover?"

She giggled and opened the book. "I sound like a tabloid column."

"Never mind that, you exasperating woman, who was she tied up with?"

"Speak no ill of the dead." She closed the book again, frowning at me. "Ted, who made it his business to steal Em's girls? Ralphie Drage went smooching around after her whenever Emmett was out of the house, and finally she gave in. Ralphie had a tongue on him,

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he was very persuasive." My wife sniffed, adding acidly, "Almost as persuasive as his bankroll."

The older you get, the more clichés come true. I really did go cold and my spine crept. Without a shred of proof or evidence, I knew how Ralphie had been killed.

The accident happened in August. Ralphie's Cadillac was air-conditioned but he had a trick of cruising along with the window down, airing his elbow, lightly grasping the roof.

Living in town, one drives down Shooters Hill several times a day. It would be just a matter of waiting beside the red light until it was glowing and there was no following traffic to observe you. Then just as the light went to green, a swift spray through the open window. Ralphie hadn't heard the story of the substance that gave swift sleep. *It smells like peaches.* And I shivered.

Em made me welcome when I called at the cottage next day, though I hardly knew what to say. Somehow in the time it took him to pop a couple of cans of beer and hand one to me we both realized what it was all about. It wasn't the confrontation I had laid awake planning, but then Emmett wasn't your formal type.

"There was provocation, Lord knows," I blurted out. "But it's not right. I—I'm going to have to tell somebody."

"Usually you go to the sheriff," he suggested gently. "But, Ted, what have you got? Some wild tale I spun. You know me—everybody does. I get carried away. I'm not even sure whether it's true myself. Between ourselves, it's out of a comic book, isn't it? Dream spray."

"You weren't making it up. You used that stuff on Ralphie."

"Want another beer?" I shook my head. "Okay, I'll walk you to the gate. Be right with you." He went upstairs for a moment, clattered down, and we went out into the yard.

Em had hacked down the spindly dead flowers and rampant weeds, piling them in a dry heap in the middle of what Carol had intended to become a lawn. Now, hardly breaking stride, he leaned over and flicked his lighter. The bonfire must have been primed with gasoline—it took flame in a soft cough of released heat and yellow-crimson daggers of fire.

He took my arm and hustled me away. "Stand clear, son. Those aerosol cans go up like bombs when you put 'em on a fire." The implication hit me an instant before a loud report came from the pyre, making smuts whirl up.

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"That's it," Em confirmed. "Sorry, but prison ain't the place for me. Guess we aren't friends any more."

Before I could answer, he said, "You know, Ralphie's new Caddy tipped the balance with Carol. Him and his new cars. Yessir, the car took her away and it was the death of him."

I didn't wait for more. Behind me as I started out the gate was a sound I wish I hadn't heard. A rare sound, unforgettable, though I've tried.

The laughter of Emmett Grigg.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

LEAVETAKING

by JOSEPH KEPPEL

While mountain climbing
One spring day
My wife Ruth turned and said,
"I cannot stand you any more,
I'm leaving you, dear Fred."
She'd need the car and boat,
She said,
The house and cabin, too—
The money, stocks, and bonds,
She thought
That she was also due.
I realized I'd also have
To pay her lawyer's fee.
I calmly pushed her
Off the cliff
And went home
Ruthlessly.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Lois Nelson, "first story" author #603, grew up in Seattle, moved to New York City with her husband after World War II, and now, since his retirement, lives in Santa Barbara. She has been writing off and on for many years—"with just enough encouragement to keep me from giving up.

"My main interest has been in dramatic writing and I have had three plays (one serious and two comedies) produced on local cable television (lots of satisfaction but no money). I've also had various dramatic sketches and skits used by community groups both in Brooklyn Heights—by the Heights Players—and here in Santa Barbara."

Now meet a very young man intent on the easy life, walking the streets of Brooklyn. "We lived in Brooklyn for twenty-seven years," writes Mrs. Nelson, "and I do know Brooklyn . . ."

THE EASY LIFE

by LOIS NELSON

I'm walking down Union Street toward the bridge that crosses the stinking Gowanus Canal and I'm patting the gun where it's hid in the pocket of my old beat-up windbreaker. The stinking Gowanus is O.K. for stinking old Brooklyn but it's not for me. This baby in my pocket what I bought off a soldier on Third Avenue is gonna get me out of this stinking town. It's gonna bring me the easy life—Florida in the winter, the sun, the swinging girls.

I'm heading for the waterfront where I cased that gas station last week. It sits on a lonely corner near the waterfront, about a block from that dump of a diner squashed down between two warehouses. The diner was where I saw the girl. She was blonde and kinda cute and she served up the coffee with a real snap. I liked her and I could see she liked me.

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After this is all over, I figure I might come back for the girl. She'd be nice to take to Florida and she'd probably appreciate it after working at that beat-up old diner.

I walk to my '64 Chevy, get in, and head out Third Avenue toward the waterfront. I keep an eye out for the cops as I get near the station. It's a busy street when the longshoremen change shift, but in between there's no one in sight. Even the hookers stay off this street at night.

The guy closes up at midnight. Strikes me that a guy with no more sense than to close up alone deserves what's coming. Maybe he's counting on that last drip of business from the longshoremen.

Hell no, I'm not nervous, but little rivers of sweat are running down my neck. I've gone over the setup a hundred times. Nothing can go wrong. I'll wait until the last guy is gone and I'll drive my old jalopy in. It's such a junk heap it looks harmless, but the motor is souped up for a fast getaway.

"Fill 'er up," I'll say, and while the jerk is bending over with the hose I'll stick the gun in his ribs.

"O.K., mister, this is a stickup. The cops won't be around for forty-five minutes. Open up the register and hand me the bills." I'll keep poking him with the gun. What he don't know is that I don't intend to ice anyone.

He'll be scared, but just to make sure I'll reinforce it. "This is my first job," I'll say, "I'm a little nervous. I hope this thing don't go off."

"Take it easy, son," he'll say.

I gotta be ready if he says "son" to me. Someone said "son" to me once. I can't remember who. Was it my mother who run off with a salesman when I was six? She had blue eyes and I liked her a lot.

Then my pop looked at me. "Sorry, kid," he said, "I can't go it alone. You stay with your Aunt Mary until spring and I'll be back to get you." He never come back. Aunt Mary didn't care when I left at fourteen.

Those were mean years. Dirty litle jobs running errands, washing dishes. Anything to eat. But now that I'm eighteen I figure the bad times is over. It comes to me that the world gave me nothin' and I owe it nothin' so I'll make my livin' takin' it away from the suckers. This is what I worked out. Small jobs that don't get you into bad trouble.

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But I'm worried the guy might say "son" and it would get me, so I figure to get a cup of coffee first to calm me down. I park the car in a dark spot and walk to the diner. The damp night air, the big shadows of the ships looming above the docks and the creak of the hawsers send a chill through me. I hope that coffee is good and hot. Hell, they won't remember me in the diner. It was morning when I was in there before. There'll be a new shift on.

But I was wrong. It's the same girl and she remembers me. Oh, wow! This is a corker. What if she asks me what I'm doing around here at night?

She's wiping off the counter when I come in, and she gives me a quick look. "Oh, you again," she says. "Didja get the job?"

"The job?" I do a quick think. "Naw," I say, "I got there too late."

"If you're aiming for tomorrow morning, you're awful early."

"No, this here is a job on the graveyard shift I'm after," I say to her.

"Gee," she says, "I wish ya luck. But who wants to work around here at night?"

"How about you?" I asked. "What're you doing around here at night yourself? You got a cop for a boyfriend?"

"No," she says, "I'd be scared stiff, but my dad owns the service station down the street. I go home with him." She smiles at me and pours me up some more coffee. "Everyone around here knows I'm Joe's kid, so they leave me alone. Otherwise I wouldn't work here on a bet."

Wow, what a smile she has! I nearly fall off the stool. "I'm not afraid," I say, straightening my shoulders and notice her noticing me.

She looks at me like I'm ten feet tall. "Gee," she says, "maybe you'd walk me to my dad's place. He's late coming for me and I'm worried."

I want to yell at her, "What do I care about you and your fathead of a dad?" But I calm down. It's not every day I'm pointed out as a hero. *Never* before as far as I can see.

So I wait while she whips off her apron, gets her coat, and says goodnight to Sam. Sam's a lot smarter than her old man. He gives the cops free coffee day and night. No one bothers Sam.

She puts her hand through my arm as we walk past those spooky warehouses. I hope she don't feel the gun in my pocket.

"Gee, I feel safe with you," she says, giving my arm a squeeze. It

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feels pretty good, that squeeze, and I strut a little. So we walk that lousy block to her old man's place . . .

He looks up in surprise as we come in. He's busy locking up the register. I can feel the gun thumping against my belly. I get a quick thought. Hit the old man on the head, grab the cash and the girl, and run for the car. No, that won't do. Stick the gun in the girl's back. He'll do anything then.

While I'm thinking, she's talking. "He walked me down the street, dad," she says. "He's not afraid of this creepy neighborhood."

The old man gives me a sharp look. Does he see the outline of the gun? Then he sticks out his hand. "Glad to see you, son," he says. "It's good to meet a real man."

What can I do but take my hand off the gun, reach out and take his hand? So I do.

"Thanks for walking Susie here," he says. She smiles at me. Her old man goes on. "You don't find many reliable young men around. Are you interested in pumping gas?"

Hell, no! I want to yell at him, but I look at Susie and say, "Hell, yes."

The gun bumping against my belly seems to swell. Can they see it? Will they call the cops? Me, the big hero because I got a gun? I don't want her to know.

I look around. There's a garbage can over in the corner with lots of loose papers on top. If I can make it to the can, I can slide the gun in.

A car drives up. A patrol car.

"Everything O.K. here, Mac?" the cop calls out.

Susie and her old man turn toward the car. "No trouble, officers," the old man answers. "Come around in the morning. I'll check those sparks for you."

My heart pounding, sweat running down my neck, I ease over to the can and slide the gun out of my pocket. It makes a soft thud as it works its way down through the papers and hits the bottom of the can.

"What was that?" the cop asks.

The old man shoots a hard look at me. Did he see me drop the gun? My heart jumps so hard in my chest I think it's gonna bounce out. What's he gonna say?

"Probably a rat," he answers.

I breathe a sigh of relief, and with that sigh goes my dream of the easy life.

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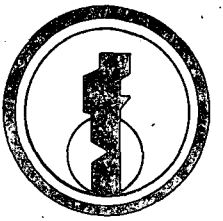

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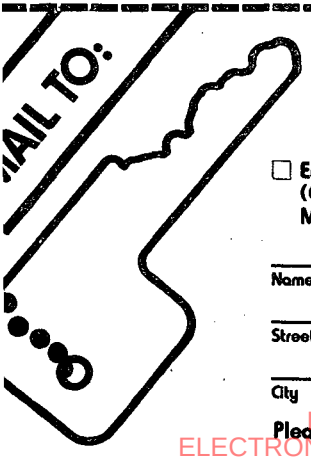

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a *NEW* short story by

ANNA CLARKE

"Will she ever divorce you?" The question had to be asked.

"No. She'd be quite glad to be rid of me, but she'd be too frightened to be alone."

There was no doubt, too, on which side were the torments of jealousy. It was exactly as they all said, all those advisers on personal problems: the hopelessness, the shut-outness, the utter helplessness of being the other woman . . .

THE LABURNUM TREE

by ANNA CLARKE

The new Hillman was as good as she had hoped. Small, light, quick to respond, easy to maneuver. It looked nice, too, and here on the highway it kept up a steady seventy-five with no effort at all. She didn't for one moment regret her choice, nor having spent the greater part of her savings on it. She took one hand off the steering wheel, gave the dashboard a little pat, and smiled to herself happily. A dear little car. A real lady's car, Matt would have said, and he would have laughed, too, at her affection for it.

Matt. Presumably they would be meeting again sometime soon, now that she was back in England permanently. Did she mind? Deliberately she set herself to think of him, to recall the expression of his eyes, the set of his shoulders, the touch of his fingers. So far, so good—tenderness, nostalgia, but no intense pain. She would test herself further, think of the first time they met. A little office up an old alleyway in the city. Creaking wooden stairs, peeling walls, a frosted-glass door with a badly typed label: *Matthew Morgan and Co. Investment Advisers.* She had almost not entered, had wondered what on earth the agency was thinking of to send her to such a

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place. And then, as she hesitated, the door opened. She had the impression of darkness, size, and overwhelming vitality.

"Mrs. Watson? Good—come in."

The room was surprisingly clean and comfortable—carpeted, curtained, with new steel furniture and even a couple of sporting prints on the wall.

"Chair?" He flung one round for her. "Now I hope they told you what I want so that we aren't both wasting our time. I'm building up a business and I haven't time to explain things. Nor have I any patience. Have you worked in finance?"

"I was ten years in the information department at Levisons." She began carefully to detail her experience.

"All right, all right. So you know the ropes. You don't look very strong. Are you quite well?"

"I haven't been very well, but I'm perfectly all right again now." He had annoyed her—arrogant, conceited, too important to be polite. She spoke with icy composure.

"Married?"

"I *was*."

"Got over it?"

"I don't know." If he wanted honesty and brevity he would get it.

The interview lasted five minutes, and she started work the same afternoon.

The little car sped along. Chalky hills gave way to buttercup-covered meadows. She was smiling no longer, but she was still not unhappy—not yet.

Ten years ago. Her marriage had petered out, drearily. No fireworks, no high drama, just she and Bobby deciding it would be much more sensible if they made a tidy end to their continued estrangement and total lack of interest in each other. It hadn't made much difference—just that she had to be careful with money since he earned very little and she didn't want to be a burden on him.

Falling in love again at thirty-six. It had never entered her head. Nor did it for at least two years after she began to work for Matt.

The business was thriving. They had moved into a suite of offices in a new block overlooking the river and had three assistants and half a dozen typists. They had expanded their sphere of activity, too, and had become a respected economic advisory unit, counting some famous names among their clients.

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But they worked just as hard as ever, and at six o'clock every evening she would go into Matt's office, hand him a cup of coffee, sit down and sip hers, and say: "Well?"

This was the signal for the daily exchange of information and advice. It had started early on in their partnership, this little conference, and when their staff increased it became more important than ever. The day's work was reviewed, the next day's planned. It was exceedingly useful for the business. It became—though for a long time neither admitted it—for both of them the happiest hour of the day.

Very few words were said that didn't relate to work. In the briefest possible communications, over many months, they came to know each other's tastes, interests, habits, loves, and hates. Matt liked Mozart; he hated gardening; he wasn't really Conservative in politics, though in his profession it was politic to appear so. She was much more adventurous than he in her reading, in her views on art and music. She persuaded him to exchange the old sporting prints for some Picasso reproductions. They went down well with the clients.

Friday, October twenty-first. That was the day. It had been a tough week. They were both more tired than usual. When she said "Well?" he didn't immediately plunge into an account of the day's doings, but rested his elbow on the desk, propped his chin on his hand, looked at her with a lowering frown, and said quietly: "God! How can I live through the weekend without you."

She had tried the bantering tone that she often used with him: "What a deprivation! Would you rather have me nag at you than your wife?"

He had not replied. He had stood up, come round the desk, pulled her to her feet, and they had clung together and kissed as if they could never stop, as if they would fall down and die if they were to part.

The meadows were gone. The dual carriageway wound through the sprawling, untidy outskirts of the metropolis. She reduced speed. The windshield seemed to have become a little clouded. It wasn't till she blinked that she realized it was her eyes that were moist. She was testing herself too far. But she couldn't stop now. The tape of memory had to run its course.

After that life had turned into a sort of big dipper of agonies and

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ecstasies. Their evening conferences were followed by dinners at her flat. It was unimaginable, the utmost that life could hold—this complete unity of mind and mind, body and body. And then came the last train home. He tried to explain, as much to himself as to her. "It sounds absurd—and hypocritical. It *is* absurd. I'm all yours. None of me belongs to her. I've no right to speak of conscience and loyalty. Perhaps I'm just being selfish. Perhaps I'm just a coward. But somehow I feel if I ever stay with you all night—"

Her mind finished the sentence for him: You will never be able to leave me again.

Perhaps she should have been hard; perhaps she should have insisted. Make a clean break—it would be better for all three in the long run. Better for him, perhaps. Better for her, always provided she could keep her conscience quiet. But almost certainly not better for Elsa. For whatever the shortcomings of Matt's wife—and she was neurotic, self-centered, and quite without understanding of his character and his interests and ambitions—there was no doubt that she would go to pieces completely if Matt were to leave her. She probably didn't even love him—she found him tiresome and rather alarming—but she did depend on him.

"Will she ever divorce you?" The question had to be asked.

"No. She'd be quite glad to be rid of me—but she'd be too frightened to be alone."

There was no doubt, too, on which side were the torments of jealousy. It was exactly as they all said, all those advisers on personal problems: the hopelessness, the shut-outness, the utter helplessness of being the other woman.

She had stuck it for seven years. She smiled bitterly to herself. The break hadn't even been violent when it came—nothing like the shocking, shaming scenes, with the utmost of cruelty and suffering on both sides, when she had previously threatened to leave him, to tell his wife, to ruin his business.

Once, when the time for his train came, and he had risen to go, she had snatched up a breadknife and stood with her back to the door.

"I'll kill you rather than let you go back to her!"

Of course, it hadn't been entirely serious, even at the time. There was in her a strong grasp of reality, a firm basis of common sense, and above all a sense of proportion that rode out many storms. But the intensity of her passion for him, the jealous love and unending frustration, had to find some outlet.

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He understood and forgave it all, as she forgave all in him.

He even understood when she announced quite casually that she was going to take a job in Switzerland for a few years. She needed the change, she said. There was no attempt to dissuade her. The conversation might have taken place between two business colleagues, with no feeling for each other but respect and professional goodwill. He made it easy for her to go; he wrote to her regularly with news of the firm, and she wrote back, equally impersonally, with news of her work.

But she didn't want to stay abroad forever, and after eighteen months she felt herself to be detached enough to return. She even looked forward to settling down into a calmer life, a less demanding job—taking up old acquaintanceships, enjoying theaters, parties, little social occasions that had found no place in the narrow, intense life she had led with him.

Bordern Wood. Not much further now. She was beginning to feel very tired. Thoughts of the welcome awaiting her at her friend's flat interrupted the course of memory. Tea, an armchair, exchange of news—it was real, solid, attractive. Why scratch at past wounds? The traffic was thickening. She edged forward impatiently. There was always a jam at this crossroads. And the first turning to the left past the crossroads led to Worcester Avenue. And at the corner of Worcester Avenue was the house where he used to go back to sleep after he had caught the last train home.

She'd never seen it; she'd never met Elsa. His life had been split in two: nine A.M. till ten P.M. on the one hand; midnight till eight A.M.—and, of course, weekends—on the other. The traffic moved forward, and as she slid the car into gear there suddenly shot through her the searing paralyzing poison of jealousy, powerful as it had ever been. Shut out, shut out. Shut out from his bed, his table, his fireside. Not knowing what sort of chair he sat in, what color walls he looked at, what sort of food he ate. A dim memory from childhood stirred, of being inadvertently locked out of her parents' house and unable to reach the bell. She was shaking, almost blinded, by the sudden onslaught of all the sensations she had believed herself to have overcome. Somehow she got the car through the crossroads, and automatically, seeking only a respite from the traffic until she could recover herself, she took the first side road on the left and drew in to the curb.

There she rested her arms on the steering wheel, cradled her head

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in them, and quietly wept. In a few minutes it was all over. The present was once more dominant, the image of her friend's flat even more attractive than before. She would ring her up and tell her she wouldn't be long. She crawled along the curb, looking for a phone-box, looking for Worcester Avenue. No harm in just driving past, she told herself—and so strongly was she now entrenched in the sanity of the moment that she felt herself justified in satisfying this harmless curiosity.

That was the house, just as he had described it. "Stockbroker's Tudor—bloody great laburnum tree all over the front windows. I can't stand laburnum. Elsa loves 'em."

She stopped the car on the opposite side of the road, leaned back, and inspected the house dispassionately. So there it was. Castle Hate—the monster of her imagination, the object, the home of all her agony. An ugly, pretentious suburban villa. She nearly laughed, and it was not the laugh of hysteria. She was laying a ghost.

And he liked it. He liked it, really. It wasn't pity for Elsa that bound him to it, it was his own innate love of convention, of the outward show of things. He really liked the weekend bridge evenings, the golf club he affected to despise. Schizophrenia. He was a genuine split personality. His love for her had been sincere—at least, she must believe that for the time being. Perhaps later on she could face the possibility that he had only been using her to satisfy himself and further his business—but not yet. He had sincerely loved her, but not enough to abandon the cozy little suburban niche. Like so many men, he had been adept at securing the best of both worlds.

She wondered what he was doing now, at half past seven on a Friday evening. Still at the office, probably, though he had written some weeks ago that on doctor's instructions he was taking things easier. He could be at home, then. How shattered would he be if she were suddenly to appear in the front door? She could do it, she knew now, without undue emotion; it would be he who would be embarrassed. Damn it, she *would*. She had been hurt quite enough to feel entitled to gratify a spiteful impulse. He'd have to introduce her to Elsa, who in all probability wouldn't be the least bit interested in her.

She got out of the car. Better have some excuse. Water for the radiator. Feeble, but respectable enough after a long business relationship such as theirs had been. Quite adequate for the neighbors.

After she had touched the doorbell, she felt a moment's apprehension. Not usually troubled by psychic impressions, she was yet

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disturbed by the uncontrollable little shiver that went through her. They were a long time answering the bell. Perhaps they were both out to dinner. With relief rather than disappointment, she turned away, and had stepped back toward the gate, under the laburnum tree, when she heard the door open.

"Marion!"

She started violently and swung round. Her first reaction was surprise. She had always thought him good-looking, but in the doorway, slumping against the wall, stood a heavy, greying, middle-aged man. His hair was disheveled and his suit looked creased and unbrushed. Only the eyes—dark, smoldering, and yet with a curiously lost look in them—were as she remembered them.

"Marion!" he called again, urgently, but did not move.

Only then, as she returned to the door, did she realize that there was something wrong, that it wasn't just the sudden sight of her that had caused him to look so shocked and so distraught.

"Matt, what is it? What's the matter?"

He caught her arm in the painful grip she remembered so well. "Marion, thank God you've come!"

It was she who persuaded him back into the house and shut the door. For a moment she stood in the dark, unfamiliar hall. And then it hit her—the smell of gas, sickly and sickening.

"Matt!" She gave him a little shake. "Where's the stop-tap?"

"I've turned it off." He spoke dazedly, like one just awakened from heavy sleep. It was still in her mind that he had been about to kill himself and that her ring at the door had saved him.

"Better get some air," she said, urging him back to the garden. "How long have you been breathing it?"

"Getting her out of the kitchen—that was worst."

Realization came to her. "Where is she? Have you called the doctor? What have you done?" She was opening and shutting doors as she snapped out the questions—a sitting-room, a smaller sitting-room, a diningroom—all empty. Upstairs then. "Matt—which room?" She was on the bottom step, tugging at his arm.

"It's too late," he said in a dead voice, and then he shook her hand away, staggered drunkenly into the large sitting-room, and fell into a chair.

With a little exclamation of impatience, she ran up the stairs, hesitated a second, and then pushed open a door. Part of her mind detached itself from the urgency of the moment and noted with interest the layout and decorations of the house. Conventional, char-

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acterless, just what she expected. On a low double-divan—and at the sight of it came a stab of pain—lay a motionless figure. Marion stepped forward, looked down on a slight, grey-haired, middle-aged woman in a powder-blue dressing gown. Her face was flushed an unhealthy purple and her eyes were closed. This was Elsa, barrier to her heart's yearning. Elsa, whose mere existence had so nearly caused her to take her life, had now taken her own. But not through Marion's fault, not through her doing.

For a second or two, the onslaught of emotions left her giddy, took from her the awareness of her own identity. Then she found herself feeling for pulse and heart, testing for breath. She wasn't sure—there might be a flicker left. Kiss of life? She wasn't sure how to do it. She pulled the bedcover and blanket from the other side of the bed, wrapped them closely round the still figure, and then went to the door and called loudly: "Matt!"

There was no reply.

She ran down the stairs. "Matt! You *must* pull yourself round—you *must* help! The doctor—who's your doctor?"

He was slumped in a chair, his head on his hands. It was as if he couldn't hear her. With a cry of distress, she ran to the telephone that lay on the table beside him and started to dial the emergency number. Before she had finished, the receiver was torn from her hand and she was flung back from the table.

"What are you doing?" He was standing up, holding her at a distance, his eyes bloodshot and his whole face ominous.

"Getting an ambulance, of course." She made her voice as calm and efficient as she could. "We can't be sure—there may be a hope. Let me phone. We haven't a moment to spare."

"It's too late. She's dead. She was long dead when I found her."

There was something in his voice that frightened her, but she still spoke briskly. "Possibly. But we still have to get a doctor—he may be able to do something."

She felt her wrist wrung. "Why the hurry? Do you wish her back to life?"

"I—oh, for God's sake, Matt, one has to try to save life—whose ever it is!"

"Does one? Do we?"

He leaned toward her, with an expression full of horrible meaning, and suddenly she knew, as certainly as if she had witnessed the whole scene, that he had murdered his wife. Fear and horror left her speechless. Did he know she had guessed?

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So close had been the communion between them, so fully had they been aware of each other's unspoken thoughts, that she couldn't hope to hide her knowledge. She raised her free hand to cover her eyes, and into her mind came the picture of her life as it had been twenty minutes ago: her nice little car, her welcoming friend, her own new-found hope and stability—nothing but memories to disturb it. And then, to satisfy a little curiosity, she had walked into a nightmare.

And upset his plans? He had wanted another few minutes to complete them, perhaps. Why had he opened the door? She would have gone away and never known. Another suicide—a depressed and nervous woman. She would have heard the news later, been overwhelmed by it, but would not have suspected. She might even have married him.

He must have seen her from the window. Why had he opened the door? Because he wanted a witness, of course—a witness to his shock and distress, the one person in the world who could never let him down, who would commit perjury for him, who would be his safety. What luck that she had turned up!

"Look dear," she said quietly, looking up at him. "I've had a dreadful shock too, you know. Have you any brandy? We could both do with it."

"You're right at that." He dropped her wrist and moved over to a cupboard in the corner. In the few moments' respite, her mind worked quickly.

"When did you find her?" she asked.

"About fifteen minutes ago—when I came in. Just before you rang the bell." He was speaking quite normally now.

"I see." She sipped her drink thoughtfully. That was the first lie. She had sat at least ten minutes in the car watching the house before she had approached the door. There was no other entrance. He must have come in earlier than he said.

"You'd just got back from the office?"

He nodded, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "We don't work as we used to."

"I see. And she was in the kitchen?"

"Head in the oven—resting on a cushion. The classic way."

"What time did you go out this morning, Matt?"

"Nineish. I've got high blood-pressure, you know. I'm supposed to be resting." Again the jocular note. She studied the stem of her glass and didn't look at him.

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"How was Elsa then?"

"Asleep, as far as I know. She never gets up till eleven. She takes sleeping pills every night. Sometimes rather a lot."

Aha. So that was how he had done it. This was to be the tale. Let him try it out on her; let her look for the weak spots before the police did.

"And had she had some last night?"

He shrugged. "I suppose so. They were always by her bed."

"Wasn't that a bit risky, Matt? Didn't you keep them for her?"

"My dear Marion, we were not on such terms. We haven't slept in the same room for years. Your memory is very short." There was a flash of his old impatience, of the directness which had sometimes, in the past, discomposed her. Even now she felt herself flush.

"I see," she said. "Then you hadn't even seen her today?"

"As you say. I last spoke to her at eleven o'clock last night when I looked into her room to say goodnight."

He spoke convincingly. He still looked exhausted, shocked, but he seemed to be in command of himself. Her mind performed another somersault. Of course, Elsa had killed herself. It was Matt's wish for his wife's death that had conveyed itself to her just now with such overwhelming intensity—the wish, not the fact.

"I see," she said again, and then she looked straight at him and their eyes met, and all the passion and despair and shock and horror and hope discharged itself in an embrace. It was like the very first time they had kissed.

The inquest wasn't at all alarming. The medical evidence was clear. Mrs. Morgan had been dead at least two or three hours when he saw her, said the police doctor. The cause of death was undoubtedly coal-gas poisoning, but it was aggravated by the excessive dose of sleeping pills she had taken. No, they alone wouldn't have killed her, though the gas alone would have.

Mrs. Morgan was often very depressed, said her own doctor. He had done his best—and so had her husband—to persuade her to undergo psychiatric treatment, but without success. All they could do was to keep her going somehow and hope she would change her mind. Yes, the depression was worst in the early mornings. She often took a second dose of sleeping tablets around six A.M.

Matt confirmed this. He hated leaving for work, he said, without reassuring himself that she was all right, but she had again and again begged him not to disturb her and had become so hysterical

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that he dared not enter her room. He usually telephoned her later in the day, but she was often in the garden and didn't reply.

"Did no one call during the day? Charwomen? Neighbors?"

"There was a daily help, but she was on holiday. Neighbors had offered to visit, but she often refused to see them."

Only during her own evidence did Marion feel a moment's anxiety. Years of an illicit love affair had still not accustomed her to lying. Those twenty minutes after she had entered the house and before they had called the police nagged at her mind.

"Just tell us in your own words, Mrs. Watson, what happened when you arrived at the house."

She began nervously, and ended with a conviction that surprised herself. She made a good witness, and so did Matt.

"Had he not suspected his wife might try to commit suicide?"

"He had thought it possible, though not very likely. She often made hysterical threats, but they came to nothing. He ought to have taken them more seriously."

There was just the right mixture of common sense and self-reproach. And there wasn't a hint of blame—only sympathy for the decent, hard-working businessman who had patiently suffered the burden of a neurotic wife.

They didn't meet or even speak on the telephone for several days after the inquest. Then they lunched together at a busy city restaurant. Some business acquaintances recognized them both and spoke a word in passing. They talked almost entirely of the firm, and the essential matters were conveyed briefly, in parentheses.

"Could you help me sort out her things?"

"Her sisters?"

"They're neither very keen. I'd rather you did."

"All right. This weekend."

"Saturday tea-time. I'll ask the Coltons in from next door."

She understood that she was to be formally introduced and accepted as a regular visitor to the neighborhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Colton interested her only as a symbol, not as themselves. He was stocky, bald, jovial, and she gathered that he was a bank manager. His wife was well dressed and lively and appeared to be going to adult-education lectures in psychology.

"Mrs. Watson used to be the mainstay of Matthew Morgan Limited," said Matt. His voice was unlike the voice she knew—he even

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looked different. This, then, was the Worcester Avenue personality, and she was meeting it for the first time.

She smiled and shook her head. "It got too much for me in the end," she said. "I'm very lazy, and do only half a day's work now."

"We always suspected he killed off all his staff after their first six weeks," said Mrs. Colton.

"A terrible slavedriver," chimed in her husband.

Elsa was not mentioned till they were about to leave. Mr. Colton lowered his voice: "Anything we can do, you know, old man—"

"If you ever need any advice about the house—" broke in his wife.

Matt thanked them warmly.

"If only I'd known," said Mrs. Colton in her rather high voice, "I'd have insisted on staying with her. But last time I invited her for morning coffee she was so—well, damned rude, I'm afraid—that it rather put me off. I always kept a lookout for her when I was gardening, but we can't see much of your front garden—not with all those shrubs and that laburnum."

Marion's heart missed a beat and then quietened down again as Matt calmly replied: "No. I don't suppose you can. Don't fret over it. There was nothing anyone could have done."

"Actually, I'm not sure whether I was in the garden that day, because it was rather a cold wind—"

Marion felt again the rising tension and scolded herself. There was absolutely no reason whatever for anxiety. Elsa had killed herself—the verdict was passed. She had been dead hours before Matt found her. All that had happened was that he hadn't been quite truthful about the time of his return. This nervousness was absurd. And yet she was tormented by a picture of Mrs. Colton pottering about her front garden, peeping through her sitting-room window, watching Marion park her car, wait there, approach the house, disappear under the laburnum tree. Nothing was said about how strange that she had happened to be passing; she had never had to use the radiator story.

It was intolerable to be on edge like this. She stood up, automatically, as if the movement would ease her.

"You don't have to go yet, do you, Mrs. Watson?" Matt looked at her in surprise. "I was hoping I could persuade you to give me your opinion on our new service for small investors—I've got it drafted out."

Marion made a show of consulting her watch. "Well, since it's not very late—"

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"Not free of the tyrant yet, you see," exclaimed Mr. Colton heartily. "Well, we'll leave you to get on with it. Susanne and I have more attractive plans for a Saturday evening."

At last they were gone. Matt returned from showing them out and made a wry face. "Sorry," he said in his normal manner. "Had to get it over. Now we're safe for the rest of the day."

She was so wrought up that her composure slipped. "Matt—do they know? Could they suspect?"

"Suspect what?"

Did he say it too abruptly, too defensively?

"That you and I—about us, I mean."

He laughed, naturally enough. "Oh, they're quite sure I've got a couple of mistresses tucked away somewhere. But they don't picture them as anyone like you."

She was reassured. Of course—how stupidly vain of her. It was his love alone that lent her glamour, made her desirable. To all other eyes she was a rather dowdy, middle-aged professional woman. That was her security. She laughed with him. "Come on, love. What do you want me to do?"

"It's her clothes. I don't know why, Marion, I just don't fancy packing them up. But you may feel just as bad. It's very selfish of me."

"I've no feelings about it at all," she said, and was surprised to find this was true.

He brought her suitcases and tissue paper and then went to wash up the tea things and prepare their supper while she did the packing.

Pretty, frilly dresses. Two good fur coats. Lots and lots of shoes. Heavens—was she ever going to get them all in? She didn't even know where he was sending them. She had never been particularly interested in clothes. There was nothing unusual about Elsa's. They were tidy and well kept, but beyond that she had no impression of the woman who had worn them.

The time passed. Matt called upstairs to ask how she was getting on.

"Not much more."

She flung the big wardrobe doors open wide to make sure there was nothing left, and exclaimed in annoyance when she saw yet another pair of grey suede shoes. She pulled them out from the far corner and adjusted the stretchers that were in them. One of them would not fit properly. She took it out in order to straighten it and as she did so a folded piece of paper fell to the floor. No need to

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wedge it, it's tight enough already, was her fleeting thought, and as she picked up the paper she noticed that it had writing on it. She turned it over and glanced at it casually—she was becoming very tired.

"TO YOU WHO—" The big capitals caught her eye, and she unfolded the sheet.

And then the room reeled about her, and she had to sit down and steady her head.

"TO YOU WHO goes through my things after I'm dead. If it's one of my sisters, then I'm sorry, Lesley—or Rosemary, if it happens to be you. But I don't think it will be. I think it will be the person I want to find this. He'll ask you to do it because he hates me too much to do it himself and because he'll think with me dead that he's safe. But he's not. You think you've got him for keeps, don't you? Got rid of me. Off her head, really, that's what you'll say. Not surprising she killed herself. A merciful release for both of them. Maybe I *will* kill myself. I often feel like it. Or maybe he'll do it for me. You think I don't know about you, don't you? That's funny! Oh, that's funny! Night after night, creeping in. 'Are you all right, Elsa? No, don't trouble to get up. I'll lock up.' Oh, no. Not with lipstick on his cheek, but showing it all over him just the same, like a tomcat back from the tiles—licking himself, preening himself."

Here the writing became blurred and almost illegible.

"Works late! Oh, yes, of course he works late. Very hard work. Not that I want him here. Don't get the pleasure of thinking I'm jealous. If you knew what he was like! Well, you will soon, because he's trying to kill me. But I've fooled him so far. I always hide my pills. He tried very hard tonight. I counted them and then left them in the kitchen. I let him bring me some Ovaltine, but didn't drink it. When he'd gone to bed I crept downstairs. There were ten missing. The biggest dose is three. I sipped the Ovaltine. It was very bitter. I poured it away. But he's too clever for me. He'll get me sometime. And when he does, I want you to know, I want you to *know,* I want you to KNOW—"

The writing became larger and larger. The last words were a huge sloping scrawl. She heard from another life Matt's shout from downstairs:

"Supper's ready!"

"Just coming," Marion called back. And then she jumped up and held her hands to her cheeks. Her staring eyes saw an image that brought fresh horror. A white and terrible face, hair pushed back,

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mouth sagging open, eyes transfixed. She almost screamed before she realized that she was looking at the reflection of herself in the wardrobe mirror. She kicked the door shut, picked up the shoe and thrust it into a suitcase, and then hastily began to throw clothes in anyhow, all the neat folds coming out. Only by rapid action could she regain her balance.

Ten pills missing. Her mind fastened on the one firm fact. But of course—he had taken them for himself. He too needed help to sleep. When was it written? The paper was quite clean, the ink fresh. The night before the death? But it didn't make sense; she had been abroad, hadn't seen Matt for over a year. No one except her own friend knew she'd be returning that day. Was it perhaps not meant for her? For whom, then? Another woman? Had Matt yet another woman? Her own successor? "The Coltons are convinced I've a couple of mistresses." The truth spoken in jest? Dear God, no! Stop these thoughts—stop this, if you want to save your reason!

"Oh come *on*, Marion!" His voice was nearer now, on the stairs. "I have a nice surprise for you," he went on, coming into the bedroom, "but it'll spoil if you don't hurry."

She sat through the meal. She ate every mouthful of her favorite Spanish omelette. She saw opposite her a worried, worn, unhappy man, doing his best to show his gratitude by appearing cheerful, by doing little things to please her.

She saw opposite her a man who had killed his wife.

For a week the letter remained folded in her purse. A dozen times a day she would resolve to burn it, to forget it, to see Matt now and then, help him if she could, but gradually break away from him, carry out the program she had set herself on her return. But still the letter remained; she couldn't bring herself to touch it; she could neither reread it nor destroy it.

The following Saturday he invited her again.

"Our neighbors are coming in later," he said apologetically when she arrived. "If you could endure an evening of bridge—well, it would help. I don't want to be hypocritical, but you understand, darling, don't you? If we can seem to be slowly renewing our acquaintance—oh, hell, it's all so stupid, having to mess about like this, but we'll be grateful later on that we did it this way."

"Did what, Matt?"

"Prepared the way for our marriage." He spoke simply, even with

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humility. The first time, she told herself grimly, that their thoughts had not run, unspoken, along the same lines.

"I'd rather not think of it, Matt," she said.

"Of course, Marion."

He was quick to respond, quick to humor her. Let her take her time.

"Matt—when Elsa died. Didn't she look odd to you when you left for the office that morning?"

"Odd?"

"Well—I mean, even if she was asleep, she didn't look a queer color or anything?"

"Not that I noticed. What's the matter, Marion? Why this fresh inquest?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose I'm morbid. I keep wondering how she spent her last hours—what time she woke up, what actually made her go down and turn on the gas."

A look of great pain and weariness came into his face. "I'd rather not know."

"What time did you phone her, Matt?"

"About eleven, I think."

"And no reply?"

"No reply."

It hurt him to talk of it. He was humoring her again, helping her through her own delayed shock and distress, helping her digest it, get over it all.

Or was he afraid she might be getting near the truth?

"But of course she couldn't have turned on the gas till the afternoon—could she? Not earlier than two or three o'clock?"

"I suppose not."

How could he have done it? Drugged her in her early morning drink? She would be already very sleepy and not on her guard. And then set the scene in the kitchen, left the gas on very low. No danger that she would recover consciousness, but it would be some hours before she would die, and that would let him out. The pills. If only those doctors could have discovered exactly when the big dose was taken! Fingerprints on the oven-tap? Had anyone tested for any? But, of course—he had turned it off himself. That was no use.

Suppose she asked straight out: "Matt—how did you kill Elsa?" What would he say? Did he know she was thinking it? Suppose she showed him the letter?

Suddenly she was sick of the whole business, disgusted with it.

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Murderer or not, she didn't want to marry him now. It would never work; the past was too heavy, the guilt too strong. They must each struggle through, find their own ways out, make some kind of a life. What on earth did it matter whether the wretched woman had put her head in the oven or whether Matt had put it there? He wasn't likely to do it to anyone else; it was only his wife he wanted to be rid of. And in any case, nothing could ever be proved.

Yet once again she decided that as soon as she was alone she would burn the letter. Elsa had wanted revenge; she had wanted to be sure that Marion would never marry Matt. All right, she need not have worried—she had got her way.

It was almost a relief when the Coltons arrived. The other Matt dispensed drinks and overcalled his hand. Marion's boredom increased. What a house! What a life!

At eleven o'clock she went upstairs with Mrs. Colton, who was rather drunk and very chatty. She looked with interest round Elsa's room.

"Made herself comfortable, didn't she? De mortuis, etc., but there's no hiding it—she really was a bitch, the way she used to talk to Matt sometimes."

Marion combed her hair and made no reply.

"I bet she killed herself just to spite him," went on Mrs. Colton. She hiccuped slightly and then apologized. "I wouldn't have put it past her to try and get him hanged for murdering her—it's the sort of vicious thing she'd do. There was an Agatha Christie, wasn't there, with a plot something like that?"

Marion muttered something. Her weariness was gone, her heart was pounding.

"We've been a bit worried about it, you know. People can be funny. But there doesn't seem to have been any talk. Actually, Ted did wonder at one time whether Matt really had—I mean, it sounds awful to accuse your neighbor of murder, but it *was* rather peculiar, with the char away, and not having spoken to her for a day, and so on. But now I'm quite sure she *did* do it herself."

She hiccuped again, and then paused dramatically.

Marion arranged the hair over her forehead. "Well?" Her voice was cool, only faintly interested.

"The laburnum tree," said Mrs. Colton triumphantly. "She'd been saying for days that she must cut the grass round the trunk—but she never did it, and I remember thinking that morning that it was as straggly as ever." She paused again. "But when I went out about

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tea-time that day, I glanced over the fence and it looked different—but what with all the excitement it went out of my head and only came back to me last night. The grass had been cut—all tidied up—and who could have done it but Elsa? Weird, isn't it? Can't you see her waking up after Matt had gone—hating him, letting herself dwell on her hatred for him—nothing to distract her—perhaps going into the garden in a last desperate attempt to keep a hold on her reason. And then it snaps, and she goes upstairs and puts on her blue dressing-gown—must look nice in death, you know—and back to the kitchen, and then a cushion. Funny, isn't it?"

Funny! Marion scarcely heard Mrs. Colton's last sentences. She was shaking with suppressed hysterical laughter. The laburnum tree!

She muttered something to Mrs. Colton. She picked up her bag and went into the bathroom. She took out the letter, flicked her cigarette lighter, held it until every inch was blackened, crumbled up the ashes, and flushed them away. It was done. The nightmare was over. But as she emerged from the bathroom, a little doubt that had been niggling at the back of her mind all through the wonderful and cleansing sweep of relief came to the surface. Mrs. Colton's word picture of Elsa's last hours—why did it disturb her? Slowly she descended the stairs, puzzled, but not dismayed.

The two men stood in the front doorway with their backs to her. They hadn't heard her approach and were still talking. The lamp on the porch lit up the garden beyond them.

"You're a reformed character, I see," came Mr. Colton's booming voice. "Taken to mowing the lawn."

Matt laughed. "Did it this afternoon. Not bad for a first attempt, is it?"

Marion stopped dead. She was aware from a sound behind her that Mrs. Colton had gone into the bathroom.

"Not bad at all," echoed Mr. Colton. "Like to come over and do ours?"

Marion came forward. "Oh, what a shame!" she cried in an artificial voice. "You've gone and cut down all the long grass round the tree. I liked it as it was—looking a bit wild."

"*Too* wild for me," said Matt. "It was a hell of a job. It can't have been touched for months."

Mr. Colton made further remarks. Marion didn't hear him. "Excuse me," she said, "I left my scarf upstairs." She ran back to Elsa's bedroom. Mrs. Colton was still in the bathroom, but there was no

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time to lose. Where should she look? The dressing-table. She pulled open a deep drawer and took out an inlaid box. The lid came up. Pasted inside was a handwritten list: "My jewels—" One glance was enough. Marion replaced the box. The small neat handwriting was quite unlike the untidy scrawl of the letter. The puzzle began to click into shape. What other proof? What else could she find? Her mind worked frantically. Nothing here. His room then.

Matt and Mr. Colton were still talking desultorily. She crept down the stairs and into the little room at the back that he used as a study. Proof, proof. Letters? She would have had no need to write letters, living just next door. Photographs? He'd never dare. His own diaries? Perhaps. There one lay, a large desk diary. She flicked back the pages. Bridge, golf with Cs., Elsa to doctor. No business—all domestic engagements. He had to write them all down—he never remembered a thing without doing so. But all this was under Elsa's eye; there was no hope here. Ah—what was this! Four weeks ago, and again eight weeks ago. An almost illegible squiggle. Probably only she herself, who knew his writing better than she knew her own, would be able to decipher it. "C. away."

"C. away." That was enough. Not for a jury perhaps—no chance of ever convincing a jury, but enough for herself. "C. away"—leaving the coast clear for Mrs. C. Easy to slip in next door on the way home; easy to slip in later in the evening to mend a fuse, get the coal in, any one of a dozen little jobs usually done by the man of the house. "C. away." Poor, stupid, booming C.

How had she done it? Got in somehow—tricked Elsa into taking a drugged drink, got her into the oven. Easy enough—Elsa was a frail little thing. So of course she had known how Elsa looked, what she was wearing. And then all that remained was to sit back and wait to get rid of C., which shouldn't be too difficult, and then to marry Matt.

Except that Marion turned up. What a blow that must have been! For of course she must have known about Marion's relationship with Matt. Wife disposed of, then ex-mistress—an even stronger rival—appears on the scene. She had worked fast. That was clever, the attempt to get rid of Marion. Arranging for her to find the forged letter, playing on her own guilt, making her think she herself had caused Elsa's despair and death. Or else let her suspect Matt, it didn't matter which. The letter would do the trick—either way it would get rid of Marion.

Then why all this rigmarole tonight? That was the only thing she

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didn't understand. Was she afraid Marion was getting to know too much? Was she afraid Marion was on her own trail? That must be it. For her own safety, she had to prove that Elsa killed herself.

But what did it matter? What did anything matter now? She didn't even blame him. Her wonder man, her hero—and a squalid little affair with the wife of the man next door. That was funny, funny! Such a personality she had, such a strong, determined character. What dreams she had been chasing all these years. A weakling, a poor helpless weakling, dependent on women, on his sick wife, on his strong mistress, on the evil cunning of the woman next door. Too cowardly to break with his wife, too cowardly to break with his mistress, too cowardly—

What was that? Mrs. Colton's high voice in the hall.

Marion picked up her bag, adjusted her scarf, and came forward smiling.

"Goodnight."

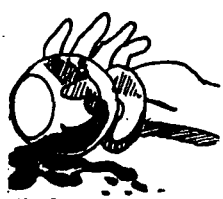
"It's been a lovely evening—goodnight."

Matt held her back. The others were out of earshot at the gate. "When are you coming again?" he whispered.

She wrenched herself free. "Never," she whispered back. "Never, never."

"Never," sang the engine of the Hillman as it sped toward the crossroads, "never, never, never."

Her eyes were dry. Her lips were still. The little car turned the corner and continued, straight and steady, on its way. Tomorrow the torment would begin again. It would be bad. It would attack in merciless waves. But tonight it was gone, and there would be other respites too. Under the swirling tide of remembered passion, the horror, the remorse, the itching doubts, there flowed the clear little stream of truth that would set her free.



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

CHRISTIE & CHESTERTON: I approached two recent books about Agatha Christie and G. K. Chesterton with some apprehension. Surely Charles Osborne's *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $17.95) could have little to add after the wealth of good Christie books in recent years. However, I found his technique of dealing with each of her books in turn, giving equal space to mysteries, romances, plays, poems, short-story collections, and nonfiction, provided the most complete study yet of this remarkable writer's career. Osborne is so scrupulous about not revealing solutions that he cannot fully discuss some of her best plots, but everything else is here in detail, including descriptions of many individual short stories. Since the text gives a running account of Christie's life at the time each book was written, a biography of sorts also emerges. There are 32 pages of photographs and an excellent Bibliography, which manages to list all her books, plays, films, and short stories in an efficient eight pages.

My apprehension about reading Alzina Stone Dale's *The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G. K. Chesterton* (Eerdmans, $18.95) was of a different sort. I'd been disappointed in Dale's brief and superficial 1978 biography of Dorothy L. Sayers, and I feared this would be more of the same. The Chesterton volume, however, is long and highly detailed, demonstrating an impressive depth of research. If only fifteen of the book's 354 pages are devoted to Father Brown, the author is still aware of Brown's importance to his creator's career. Since Eerdmans is a religious publisher, it's not surprising that special emphasis is given to Chesterton's religious beliefs, but the book also details his friendship with E. C. Bentley, his activities in the Detection Club, and other matters of interest to mystery readers. It's an impressive volume—a standard biography of Chesterton for our times.

HAMMETT'S X-9: After finishing his final novel, *The Thin Man,* in 1933, Dashiell Hammett agreed to plot and write a daily comic strip, "Secret Agent X-9," to be

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drawn by artist Alex Raymond. The four lengthy episodes he produced for this strip are now collected in book form as *Dashiell Hammett's Secret Agent X-9* (International Polygonics, Library of Crime Classics, $9.95 paper), and they show Hammett at his pulp-writing best, with complex whodunit plots rarely found in comic strips. The book has an Introduction by William F. Nolan and an Appendix with a little-known later episode of the strip written by Leslie Charteris. It's a must for Hammett and Charteris collectors.

A NOVEL CONTEST: Publisher William Morrow is offering a $10,000 prize for the best correct solution to *Who Killed the Robins Family?*, an August novel by veteran mystery writer Thomas Chastain. The solution has been locked in a bank vault, and the name of the winning reader will be announced next May at the American Booksellers Association convention. Other readers may then obtain Chastain's solution by returning a card to the publisher. The contest idea was created by Bill Adler, and Morrow has big promotion plans for the book.

HARDBOILED FICTION ABROAD: Overseas readers still flock to American tough guys. Japan's Maltese Falcon Society recently named Robert B. Parker's 1981 novel *Early Autumn* as the best hardboiled fiction published there last year. And the fifth issue of the French magazine *Hard-Boiled Dicks* is devoted to the late William P. McGivern. It includes an interview, photographs, Bibliography, and a short story.

RUTH RENDELL: This year's Lifetime Achievement Award of the Popular Culture Association has been presented to Ruth Rendell. A recent book promotion by the Quality Paperback Book Club featured her among its "Women writers to watch . . . nine writers who are shaping contemporary fiction." She was the only mystery writer included.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Ballantine Books continues its handsome series of Cornell Woolrich reprints with an original short-story collection, *Rear Window and Other Stories,* edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. Due late this year, it includes five novelets—"Rear Window," "Change of Murder," "Three O'Clock," "Post Mortem," and "Momentum"—which served as the basis for Alfred Hitchcock films or TV shows. "Post Mortem" has never before appeared in a Woolrich collection.

Atheneum will launch a new series of juvenile mysteries, called Escapade, this fall. Included in the first list are six new titles by Willo Davis Roberts and others. The 128-page hardbound books will sell for $3.95 each.

Diane Johnson's long-awaited Random House biography, *Dashiell Hammett: A Life,* scheduled for May, has been postponed till fall.

Plans are afoot to revive *The Saint Mystery Magazine,* last published in 1967.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Although hardly thought of as "merely" a mystery-film director, John Huston has made such significant contributions to our genre—achievements at which the recent gala tribute tendered him by the American Film Institute only hinted—that recognition by the mystery world is long overdue. Not only did he direct perhaps the finest detective film ever made, *The Maltese Falcon*—his first film at that—John Huston returned to the thriller form often and with distinction.

Huston, truly a Renaissance man, was in his youth a crime reporter, a Greenwich Village actor, and a painter in Paris. Then, as Orson Welles expressed it during the AFI salute, he started his screen career "at the very lowest ladder of the movie world—he was a writer." Working as a contract scripter for Universal and other studios, he contributed—often unbilled—to a number of fondly remembered melodramas. The 1932 *Murders in the Rue Morgue*—wildly derived from Edgar Allan Poe's whodunit plot, throwing in Bela Lugosi as a manic scientist—was oddly faithful to the Poe spirit. *The Amazing Doctor Clitterhouse* (1938), from a successful stage play, has behavioral scientist Edward G. Robinson study gangster methods with such devotion he becomes addicted. *High Sierra* (1941), on which Huston collaborated with W. R. Burnett from the latter's novel, has a "mad dog" killer on the run softened and eventually felled by his concern for a clubfooted girl. *Three Strangers* (1945) tells of three men who share a sweepstakes ticket with bizarre results.

But Huston the writer hungered to be Huston the director, and he begged Warner Bros., the studio at which he was then working, to give him a property. They handed him "a little detective movie" (Lauren Bacall's words) they had already filmed twice before, Dashiell Hammett's *Maltese Falcon,* and with it in 1941 Huston made an electrifying directoral debut. "Here's to plain speaking and clear understanding," the sinister Gutman toasts Sam Spade, and the pursuit of the elusive black statuette—a pursuit dreams and great films are made from—begins. Interestingly, Huston never again experimented with a pure detective movie. But although he was active in many genres, he did not neglect the mystery thriller.

Two years after *Falcon,* he directed *Across the Pacific,* a tense wartime adventure in which Humphrey Bogart clashes with spies aboard a freighter. Then, in 1948, Huston gave us *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* a searing drama about how greed brings violence to three shabby gold-prospectors

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who—all too briefly—strike it rich. The film won Huston Oscars both for best direction and best screenplay.

The same year saw the release of *Key Largo,* from Maxwell Anderson's play, in which Edward G. Robinson in his last major gangster role played a crazed criminal holding Bogart and Bacall at bay on a storm-lashed Florida key.

After another espionage yarn—*We Were Strangers* in 1949—Huston directed one of the best of all *noir* crime films the following year. *The Asphalt Jungle,* with a screenplay co-authored by Huston from a Burnett novel, is a powerful, realistic drama of a jewel robbery meticulously planned by an aging master criminal, Doc (played with wonderful moral decay by Sam Jaffe). The underworld we enter is no less corrupt than the social order above the asphalt, and far less hypocritical.

Black comedy about doublecrossing thievery is the essence of the sophisticated *Beat the Devil* (1954). *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963), from Philip MacDonald's novel about a multiple murderer, probes as have few other films the nature of pure evil. Huston was one of several directors involved in *Casino Royale* (1967) and helmed Kipling's high-spirited adventure thriller, *The Man Who Would Be King* (1976), as well as the good-hearted *Annie* (1981), which had considerable mystery elements.

In addition to writing and directing, John Huston also acts, and does so superbly in one of the best crime films of modern times, Robert Towne's *Chinatown* (1974)—in which he is a suavely evil industrialist tampering with water rights and his own daughter. He also plays a sinister patriarch (vaguely patterned after Joseph Kennedy) in the recently rereleased assassination-conspiracy drama, *Winter Kills* (1979).

Huston, the compleat artist, has never been pigeonholed as a mystery specialist, but has certainly labored in our fields. One can only agree with Lauren Bacall's AFI tribute as she recalled Sydney Greenstreet's words to Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon:* "It was neatly done, sir. It was neatly done."

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INTERVIEW: PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

EQMN: You share a birthday—January 19th—with Edgar Allan Poe. Have you been influenced by his work?

HIGHSMITH: I am not sure I was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, but I was impressed by his work since I was thirteen or so. His was a wild imagination in full flight. He chanced anything.

EQMN: The Talented Mr. Ripley won the Grand Prix de Littérature

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Policière. What did you think of the Rene Clement film made from the book *(Purple Noon)?*

HIGHSMITH: I thought it was a very successful film, the acting good on the part of the two male protagonists. Ripley's playing up to the girl was out of character with Ripley, however. And I didn't care for his being caught at the end, but perhaps these were the morals of 1962.

EQMN: Your amoral hero, Tom Ripley—is he your only series character?

HIGHSMITH: Yes.

EQMN: Have you ever considered creating a series detective?

HIGHSMITH: I would never attempt a detective series, because the mystery element doesn't interest me.

EQMN: Your highly respected and recently revised *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* extols the freedom of being a writer but also stresses the economic problems. One point you make I hadn't heard before is that a reason a writer's output tends to diminish as he or she gets older is because one can no longer do on four hours' sleep.

HIGHSMITH: Maybe it's not so much a question of being able to do on less sleep, when young, which makes for greater production. A young writer is less selective, I think. An older writer becomes very choosy about ideas and themes, and is more aware of a standard to be kept up.

EQMN: Is there anything that would lead you to discourage an unpublished writer who asked you to criticize his work?

HIGHSMITH: Yes, I would say clichés, and a carelessness or the easy-way-out in depicting emotions. It is not difficult to tell if a writer is concerned about his characters.

EQMN: Francis Hope, the intellectual, has remarked that if there is a contemporary crime writer who could possibly be encountered in the same street as Dostoevsky, it is you.

HIGHSMITH: That is certainly a very flattering remark from Francis Hope. Maybe Mr. Hope is thinking about themes. I was very impressed in my adolescence by *Crime and Punishment,* its theme, the justification that Raskolnikov tried to convince himself of, and his failure in this. I know morally this had a great effect on me. Unlike Dostoevsky, I can't solve everything by confession, repentance, or a belief in God. He believed there was a spark of goodness in every criminal, however evil his deeds. I perhaps believed this in my teens, but not any longer. I think poverty and its sometimes attendant dishonesty and violence has prevented or eradicated in many people now the spark of goodness that Dostoevsky wrote about. The men who drop smallpox-infected garments by airplane down to the tribes in Brazil because they want the forest land there—can they possibly be said to have a conscience? It is beyond me to write about such people. I don't like to hear of them being compared to animals. No animal plots like that, for greed alone.

EQMN: We reprinted some of

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your stories from *The Animal Lover's Book of Beastly Murder*. Is it true that you have a passion for animals, especially cats?

HIGHSMITH: I don't think I have a passion for animals, but I find them interesting because they behave naturally. I prefer cats, I suppose, because they are quiet and graceful.

EQMN: It has been said that you are something of a loner. Does that mean you're lonely in a crowd?

HIGHSMITH: I don't feel lonely in a crowd. I'm seldom in a crowd, in fact. Parties are not my idea of recreation or even fun. I have a few good friends whom I value highly, and I like to see them alone, and they seem to prefer this, too. Even one more person, a third, changes the atmosphere and somehow creates a defensiveness, in all three parties.

EQMN: You were born in Fort Worth, attended college and lived in New York, and have lived in Mexico, Italy, England, France, and Switzerland. Is climate important to you?

HIGHSMITH: In a way. I like changes of climate such as one finds in France, without extremes. The Taxco, Mexico, climate can become boring at a constant 68 degrees and one well defined rainy season, but it is ideal for tourists. Constant rain is depressing, at least to me. Sunny days in France cheer me up, I must say.

EQMN: What about terrain?

HIGHSMITH: I like the land a bit flat. Flat land gives the advantage of maximum sunlight, unblocked by mountains.

EQMN: Nearness to water?

HIGHSMITH: The sea is pretty—a lake also. But it is not important to me to be near.

EQMN: You've said you create fiction out of boredom with reality. What tends to bore you?

HIGHSMITH: Having to go to certain cities—Paris now, sometimes New York or London—for business engagements. Most dinner parties bore me. An excess of household chores bores me and I try to spread them out, just a little every day and no more.

EQMN: How else besides writing do you fight boredom?

HIGHSMITH: I try to be alone as much as possible. For variety or activity, I like working with wood—carpentry or whatever. I even enjoy ironing, because it is excellent for daydreaming.

EQMN: Don't you like cities, then?

HIGHSMITH: I can't think of one I would like to live in. Certainly not New York, where I lived from age six to thirty. I need some grass under my feet, silence, and a few friendly birds flying around.

EQMN: Do you like travel at all?

HIGHSMITH: I like to travel by railway, with a nice picture window to look out of—from Paris to Vienna, for instance. Airplanes have become a torture, their only virtue being speed.

EQMN: You keep snails, don't you?

HIGHSMITH: I used to keep ten or twelve snails, and they multiplied rapidly in their tank of moist earth. I don't keep snails lately, because their tanks have to be

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tended daily and this is difficult to do when traveling.

EQMN: Some authors won't use coincidence in their fiction, but you do. How do you manage to do it and still play fair with the reader?

HIGHSMITH: I believe that coincidences turn up pretty frequently in life, or in reality, so I don't know why any writer would rule them out of his work. I am fond of what I call a wild coincidence in my stories. I think it worked in *The Blunderer.* A writer has to judge whether he is "playing fair" or not. It is not a question of fairness but of credibility, so if the coincidence cannot be believed, then it's a bad story and probably will be rejected.

EQMN: Do you keep a journal?

HIGHSMITH: I do not keep a diary now, though I did from fourteen to thirty-three—dreary stuff that I never looked back at. I do keep notebooks, and have done so since I was fifteen. I now have thirty-four. These contain story and novel ideas, poems, thoughts of all kinds, notes on people and places. These notebooks or *cahiers* are important to me.

EQMN: Graham Greene says you create a claustrophobic world we enter each time with a sense of personal danger.

HIGHSMITH: I never think about frightening readers. I just write a story and hope to put it into its most entertaining form.

EQMN: Your short stories are so rich and varied, do you prefer them to writing novels?

HIGHSMITH: Short stories and novels are equally interesting to me, but in different ways. It is possible for me to write a "perfect" short story now and then, but I shall never write a "perfect" novel. A good short story is a brief emotional experience for the reader, and an excellent short story is unforgettable. A short story is rather like a poem, and can be read at one sitting, in a matter of minutes. A few people have said they prefer my short stories to my novels. I can't say which I prefer—they are each a different kind of work.

EQMN: What stories and novels of your own and others do you most admire?

HIGHSMITH: Of my short stories, I think I prefer "The Terrapin." Also "When the Fleet Was In at Mobile" is not bad. Of my novels, I like *The Tremor of Forgery* best. The hero is reasonably intelligent and he sorts out his emotional life in his own writer's way—he is a writer in the book—which may not be the advisable way but is true to his character.

As for others' short stories, I think Saki's are excellent. Also some of Edna O'Brien. I like Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* Conrad's *Youth,* and Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet.*

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

No regular reader of this magazine needs to be convinced there are plenty of short-story writers around whose works deserve being collected in permanent form. Unhappily, though, single-author short-story collections have long been considered a dubious commercial venture by publishers, and thus many worthy writers go uncollected. The lucky few who are collected have almost all established a solid reputation for book-length works.

So far, 1983 is proving an unusually good year for single-author collections in the latter category. A new Julian Symons volume was noted here last month. Bill Pronzini's *Casefile* (St. Martin's, $13.95) gathers ten stories (including two longish ones not previously published in English) about one of mystery fiction's best present-day private eyes, San Francisco's "nameless" detective. And an eagerly awaited selection of John Dickson Carr's radio plays will be discussed in a future column. There are also new collections out by two other frequent *EQMM* contributors.

**** Lawrence Block: *Sometimes They Bite,* Arbor House, $14.50. The eighteen stories gathered here, almost all from *EQMM* or *AHMM,* are witty, ingenious, fast-reading, and smoothly told. The closest comparison in style and humor is probably Jack Ritchie, though Block tends to write at slightly greater length. Especially nice in my view are the title story, "Nothing Short of Highway Robbery," and "Collecting Ackermans." Series characters appearing are Matt Scudder and Bernie Rhodenbarr (once each) and Martin Ehrengraf (twice). Block provides a brief Introduction.

*** Ruth Rendell: *The Fever Tree, and Other Stories,* Pantheon, $11.95. The eleven stories in Rendell's third collection, all but one from *EQMM,* may not be quite as fine as those earlier gathered in *The Fallen Curtain,* but they are highly recommended for their distinguished style, their psychological insights, and their effective use of background. Especially impressive is the title story, set in an African game reserve and concerning the kind of marriage so often depicted (but not celebrated) in crime short stories.

*** Ellis Peters: *The Virgin in the Ice,* Morrow, $11.95. The latest Brother Cadfael novel offers more action and adventure than detection, but it's a rewarding book, particularly for regular readers of the series. The plot concerns a young brother and sister who vanish while traveling through enemy territory in the midst of a war between two royal factions for control of Twelfth Century England. Cadfael, in trying

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to find them, finds more than he expected.

*** Robert Barnard: *A Little Local Murder,* Scribners, $11.95. This early Barnard, first published in Britain in 1976, may be the kind of novel sometimes rejected as "too English" by American publishers, at least until the author develops a following. Barnard's village, whose name (Twytching) rather suggests the novel's droll and satiric tone, is the scene of fevered competition for spots on a radio show being prepared for broadcast in the sister city of Twytching, Wisconsin. As in some of the author's other books, the early light tone makes the grim and shocking solution all the more impressive.

*** William L. DeAndrea: *Killed with a Passion,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $11.95. The third novel about Network troubleshooter Matt Cobb takes him to upstate New York to attend a wedding and guard his employers' interests in the decision on the local cable TV franchise. Though the narrative, smoother and funnier than ever, is quite contemporary, DeAndrea is a Golden Age throwback in his interest in unusual murder methods and absolute fair play. In this one, he showcases his clues so audaciously, some readers may actually solve the case on the evidence.

*** Jane Dentinger: *Murder on Cue,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $11.95. DeAndrea contributes an appropriately glowing jacket quote to the first novel of actress Dentinger, who shares his sense of humor and allegiance to the traditional whodunit. Jocelyn O'Roarke's first Broadway part is in as lethal a production as those imagined by Simon Brett or Ngaio Marsh. This is the best American theatrical mystery in quite a while and a strong candidate for first-novel Edgar.

** Richard Ben Sapir: *The Body,* Doubleday, $16.95. Bones of a crucified man found in a tomb under Jerusalem may be those of an unrisen Jesus. Vatican investigator Father Jim Folan must find out if it's true (and keep it a secret, true or not), while guarding his chastity from a sexy archaeologist. The tantalizing situation, a natural for blockbuster bestsellerdom, will keep most reading to the end. However, there's a bit *too* much research to get in, and too much exposition clumsily presented as dialogue.

The publishers of Robert Traver's 1958 courtroom classic *Anatomy of a Murder* note its twenty-fifth anniversary with a new trade paperback edition (St. Martin's, $7.95). In a new Introduction, Traver takes a humorous look at how the novel came to be written and the impact it had on his writing career. The author's somewhat old-fashioned and over-formal style is suited perfectly to describing the trial, if not the events outside. He sums up his reasons for writing the novel and much of its appeal when he writes, "I felt . . . that a great part of the tension and drama in any felony trial lay in its understatement, its pent and almost stifled quality, not in the usually portrayed shoutings and stompings and assorted finger-waggings."

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Customers of Eric Ossenheimer often had their jewelry stolen within a day or two of taking it home from his store . . . A lively sequel to Jane Bosworth's "It Weren't Right" in the February issue . . .

SKINNING VARMITS

by JANE BOSWORTH

Ain't no sadder chore than boxing up the belongins a someone ya loved. It's somethin' we all got to do sometime. So I boxed up most ever'thing a Elmer's an' set it out on the front porch a the rock shop for one a them trucks to pick up. 'Bout the only thing I couldn't part with was his collection a manmade gem stones. They was too much a part a both of us.

"Em," he always used to speak at me. "Some a these is good enough to fool a expert."

I reckon they was too.

Well, I stood on that porch an' watched those men load up Elmer's things. When that old truck spit dust back at me, I felt the cold hand a self-pity tuggin' at my heart strings. The desert was gettin' all blurry again.

"Em," I told myself. "Ya jus' can't carry on like this. Cryin' don't bring nobody back."

It was 'bout that time that the phone rung. I went in to see who it was. Althea Rent, an old school chum from Old Congress, was callin' me from Prescott.

"It's gone," she moaned at me. "Em, I only took it off to do some gardenin' an' when I come back in to wash up it was gone. Thirty years. I ain't never seen him so proud as when he slipped that ring on my finger. What am I gonna do?"

"Call the sheriff, Althea."

"I did. He come out to the house, all official-like. Asked me if Homer had bought that ring at Eric's Jewelers on the corner a Ligurta and Welton. I recollected that he had. The sheriff, he shrugged, an' started fillin' out his report. It seems that customers

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of Eric's often have their jewelry stolen within a day or two a takin' it home. Ain't no way to prove nothing against Eric Ossenheimer 'cause the stuff is melted down an' the stones is reset. Sheriff said 'bout the only way to nail a crook like that is to catch him sellin' stones that ain't real. Homer's fit to be tied. Got out the old Winchester his daddy give him, loaded it with buckshot, an' swore he was gonna take care a that varmit. Em, even if the gun will still shoot, he'll be arrested."

"They's more than one way to skin a varmit an' Homer shoulda knowed that. You tell that man a yours to sit tight till I get there. I got me an idear."

The first thing I done after hangin' up was to go out back an' dig up Elmer's money jar an' bring it back inside. They was over two pounds a hundred-dollar bills inside that jar, stacked one atop the other, and girdled with a rubber band. Elmer, he'd scribbled $55,100 on a piece of paper an' slipped it under the rubber band.

I stuffed that money inside my pocketbag, packed a suitcase, an' phoned Jake McEwan. Seems that the gigolo a the senior citizen's set was in between ladies an' bored. He jumped at the chance to help me.

"Emily, my dear," he said, "by the time you get here I shall be ready. But, dear, we will take my new Mercedes. Your old jeep is too decrepit to be seen in."

"Decrepit! Hell, you old buzzard, it's paid for."

"Emily, sweet Emily—I couldn't bear to be seen in it."

"Suit yourself. It's your gas. See ya soon."

I hung up 'fore he had a chance to tell me it'd be my gas. I figured to let him sweat that one out. Jake's a likeable old coot. Used to be on stage. To ladies who fall for his line a bull, he's wiry. To those a us with the sense God give us, he's a skinny reprobate who looks like a cross between an old salt an' a plantation owner. But he's got the smarts of a fox an' that's jus' what I needed.

By the time I got there he was hauling his leather suitcases outa the house an' tryin' to fit them in the trunk. From what he was taking, you'd a thought we was goin' to be gone a month. He even had a leather briefcase. I parked Old Lizzy 'side his Mercedes, got out, an' hauled my rope-bound suitcase over to him. He frowned at it, took out his cases, an' reloaded with mine on the bottom.

"About the gas, Emily—" The words oozed off his tongue.

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"Don't you worry none 'bout that, Jake. I always knowed that buying gas ain't your style. Hell, I'll even pump it."

He grimaced.

"Emily, dear Emily. I couldn't sleep tonight if you had to dirty your hands pumping my gas. We shall purchase our gas at a Full Service station."

"You're mighty free with my money."

"Emily, you have all the finesse of a beavertail cactus."

"Hell, Jake. Even roses got thorns."

"Emily. A lady of your caliber deserves nothing but the best."

He opened my door for me and bowed when I sat down. I let out a guffaw that Lucifer woulda envied. Jake, he got in behind the wheel, started the engine, an' turned onto Highway 89 to Prescott.

Took us 'bout an hour to get to Althea's house, give or take a few minutes for a gas stop. Althea, she welcomed us proper like an invited us in. Homer, he looked up from oilin' his shotgun an' grumbled somethin' or t'other. Jake an' me, we plopped down in the kitchen chairs 'side Homer an' let go of our idear.

Homer sighted down that old shotgun an' squeezed the trigger. First one bolt, then the t'other clicked down. "If your plan don't work I'm gonna plug him," he said.

"Sir," Jake said. "I am ever so confident that Emily's idea will work. I have known the lady a goodly number of years and I have never known her ideas to fail."

Homer, he set down the gun and chawed on them words. He shed a look a pure disgust on Jake. "Stuffy, ain't ya," he said.

Jake, he knowed better than to answer that. He excused hisself to go into the bathroom to finish his makeup. I went into the bedroom to squeeze myself into a pair a faded jeans. Then I put on one a Elmer's old shirts an' cuffed it up to my elbows. I give my hair a ruffin' up an' walked to where Homer sat sulkin'.

"Ya look like a range cow," Homer said.

"An' you got all the tact of a polecat," I snapped.

Jake, he come mincin' his way outa the bathroom, usin' his cane to support hisself. His face was pale as death warmed over—but it didn't look madeup.

'Fore we left for the jewelry store, Jake put my money inside his briefcase. Then he tucked the paper bag I give him under the money. Took us less than ten minutes to drive to the store. Jake, he went on inside 'fore I did. By the time I got there, he had this ferret-eyed

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man in the spiffy duds talking real quietlike. I seen the man's eyes appraise my worth an' set it at somethin' less than a bum.

They was somethin' animal-like about that man. He had on this shiny black coat. The lights was jiggin' on his bald spot. His snout was hooked. His jaw more or less melted into his chin an' he had a big Adam's apple. 'Minded me of a vulture.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"Like ta do some browsin' first," I said.

"My name is Mr. Ossenheimer. Call me if you wish to see anything."

I moseyed from case to case, peerin' inside like I knowed what I was looking for an' couldn't find it. I seen a look a pain cross Jake's face an' I seen him pull a gold pillbox from his pocket an' put a pill under his tongue. Then I moseyed up 'side a him an' he shed a look a pure love on me.

"Emily, sweet Emily," he cooed. "What would you like today?"

"Nothin'. Ain't nothin' but junk in here."

Ossenheimer's eyes went wide an' his jaw fell open. He gaped at me. He squirmed. He hurrumped. An' then he smiled. "Perhaps we could design something to suit the lady," he said to Jake.

"Could you design a ring? Fer me?" I asked.

"Of course, madam. Here at Eric's we employ the finest designers in the world. And all of our diamonds are certified by the American Gemological Society. You could resale them tomorrow for at least what you paid today."

"What's this here certificate you're jawin' about?"

"An appraisal, madam. Done by an independent expert. A guarantee, if you like."

"An' how do you go about getting this certificate?" Jake asked. "Emily has a way of losing papers."

"You simply take the stones to an appraiser. They are quite easily found. I believe some of them are listed in the yellow pages."

"Do you accept cash, Mr. Ossenheimer?" Jake asked.

"Yes, but we do like to make out a receipt to verify the cost of the stones. It's strictly confidential, of course."

We 'greed to follow the vulture into his lair. Jake, he liked to never made it. Acted like it pained him somethin' terible jus' to walk. I was already restin' on this plush couch with my dogs up on the coffee table when he set beside me. Ossenheimer was twisting the dials on this big safe in the corner a the room. He opened it an' faced us.

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"Just how much money did you have in mind to spend, Mr.—?"

"Tonnely. Josiah Tonnely," Jake lied. "This here is my wife, Emily. We've been married forty-one years."

"Two," I said.

"Very well, Emily. Forty-two. It was love at first sight for me the day I walked into Rose's Bar and watched you drink three miners under the table. I love a strong woman."

I 'bout choked on that one. The only thing I ever drink is tea. But I shed my best smile on him. The one that shows off the gold in my mouth.

"Doc says the old ticker's about worn out," Jake said and thumped his chest. "Says I'm too weak to survive one of those valve jobs. Before I go, I want to give Emily something to remember me by. About three one-carat diamonds ought to do that."

I let out a wail that woulda waked the dead, swabbed my eyes with a handkerchief, and wept with all the grace of a elephant. Jake, he reached out a shaky hand and patted me. "There, there, it's all *right,* Emily. Now you know, we must face the facts. All of them."

"I knowed it," I said and gave a final honk into the handkerchief.

Jake opened the briefcase an' set that stack a bills on the coffee table. Ossenheimer goggled at it. Then he pulled a tray from the safe an' set it 'side the money. Hundreds a diamonds was setting on black velvet, twinkling like stars in the desert on a moonless night. He tweezered three round ones from the tray an' set them on the coffee table. Then he pulled these official-looking papers out from under the top part a the tray an' handed 'em to Jake.

I looked over his shoulder as he read. They was G.I.A. Certificates all right. They was also the most popular size an' shape for diamonds. The perfect match for what I had in mind.

"Well, Emily?" Jake asked.

"They's the prettiest stones I ever seen."

"We'll take them, Mr. Ossenheimer. How much are they?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

Jake started peeling off bills like it were something he did ever' day of his life. Ossenheimer put each stone in its own little bag and tightened the noose around each bag. Money and diamonds was exchanged. Jake, he put the little bags right atop my paper bag an' set the certificates on top a those. He give Ossenheimer a address in Wickenburg an' I hoped it weren't a real one. Jake, he got to his feet an' I led the way outa the office. Jake made it as far as the counters fore he fell to the floor. His eyes rolled to the whites an'

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fluttered there. His mouth fell open. Spit bubbled down his chin. An' his whole body begun to shake. I run to help him. Ossenheimer, he just stood there not knowin' what to do.

"Get me some water!" I yelled at him. "An' call an ambulance!"

He lit off down the hallway an' I opened the briefcase an' done what had to be done. A few minutes later, Ossenheimer come runnin' back with a cup a water in his hand an' a look a pure fright on his face. He handed me the water an' I bathed Jake's forehead with it.

When the ambulance come an' took Jake away, Ossenheimer helped me into his office. When I'd cried myself out, I mopped up my face an' looked at him.

"I got to ask you to take back these diamonds," I said. "We can't get no insurance on Jake, an' the doctors is gonna want that money. Iffen Jake pulls through, we'll be back for them stones."

Ossenheimer give me back ever' one a them bills an' I give him back the stones. He offered to drive me to the hospital, but I told him my troubles is best dealt with by me. I left the store an' drove to Mercy General Hospital.

The desk girl seemed mighty pleased to see me. She took me into this room an' it was all I could do to keep from laughin'. Jake was standin' 'side his bed, dressed in nothing but a paper gown, lookin' like a skinny-legged rooster. This husky nurse had a hold a his clothes an' wasn't 'bout to give 'em back.

"Emily," he said to me, "please tell this dunderhead to give me back my clothes. I am not going to stay here another minute.",

"The doctor has to see him first," she said to me.

"Jake, he don't believe in no doctors," I told her. "Says his faintin' spells ain't serious. Iffen you don't want your doctor bit or kicked or somethin' worse, you best give him back his clothes."

"All right," she said, "but he'll have to sign this form releasing the hospital from all liability."

He signed the form an' she give him back his clothes.

She glanced at the name on the paper.

"Mrs. Tonnely," she said, "please get him to a cardiologist."

"I reckon he'll die 'fore I can do that."

I left Jake to get dressed an' paid the bill. It didn't take him long to get us outa there an' drive us back to Althea's house.

It was Homer that let us in. We all sat round the kitchen table an' he rubbed some more oil into that gun a his. Althea, she poured us each a glass a lemonade an' then sat down. Jake, he pulled that wad a money from the briefcase.

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"Homer, how much did that ring cost?" he asked.

"Fifteen thousand, five hundred dollars."

Jake, he counted off that money an' laid it on the table. Then he took my paper sack out a the case an' spilled three one-carat diamonds on the tabletop.

"What have you done?" Althea asked.

"Althea, dear. It was a simple matter of switching the real stones for cubic zirconia simulated diamonds. Elmer, God bless his soul, had three such gems in his collection. Now, dear, please phone the sheriff and give him an anonymous tip as to the quality of merchandise Mr. Ossenheimer sells. Be sure to disguise your voice. Now, Emily, as to my share of the take. I think ten thousand is rather a paltry share for the remarkable role I played."

"I ain't one to get suckered in by the likes a you," I said. "Nor do I welsh on my promises. You gonna get what we 'greed on an' nothin' more."

"Well," he sighed, "ten thousand should be enough to keep me in caviar for a few months. Please keep me in mind if you ever need any more help skinning varmints, as you so aptly put it. I do so enjoy the company of intelligent women."

Intelligent. Ya know, I always prided myself on my smarts. For the first time in pert near two decades, I seen what the ladies seen in old Jake. He was a carin' man. He had a right handsome smile too. Then my head yanked my vanity back in line.

"You got a slick tongue, Jake. But flattery don't get a body nowhere with me."

"Emily, sweet Emily. You have eyes which can see into a man's soul—and his pocketbook. I just thought I'd try, dear."

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a *NEW* Simon Bognor story by

TIM HEALD

In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Tim Heald comments on the first Simon Bognor novels: "All five of the mysteries are meant to be light (not to say comic) and, as mysteries go, not as mysterious as they might be. They star Simon Bognor, who is a special investigator from the Board of Trade, and silly with it. He moves from an Anglican friary to the English stately home business, Fleet Street, dogbreeding, and, finally, food. I know about all of these from personal experience. Bognor always gets his man but he is not entirely faithful to Monica, who is plain but long-suffering. He smokes, drinks, and gets no exercise."*

A warm welcome to Simon Bognor, and to Tim Heald. May this be the first of many stories by him in the pages of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . .

SIMON BOGNOR AND THE CASE OF THE RIDICULOUS HAT

by TIM HEALD

Simon Bognor of the Special Investigations Department of the Board of Trade was on holiday. The holiday was well deserved but, like practically every holiday Bognor had ever taken, doomed. He had begun by mislaying his passport at Heathrow Airport, had continued by eating a surfeit of steamed cherrystones which upset his stomach and confined him to bed for the only sunny day of the first week—and now this.

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He and the long-suffering Monica, Mrs. Bognor, were sitting on the porch of their rented cottage eating what Americans, to Bognor's amusement, called English muffins. Monica was reading the more interesting passages of the *Cape Cod Times* out loud.

"Uh-oh," she said, "I don't like the sound of this. Don't they say disasters always come in threes?"

"I'm not superstitious," said Bognor, his voice sounding rather foggy through a mouthful of muffin.

"Well, get a load of this," said Monica, who had already acquired some uncharacteristic American figures of speech. She began to read: "Waste-disposal-truck magnate missing believed slain," she said.

"Oh, God." Bognor winced as if in actual bodily pain. "Not Kartofelpeffer?!"

"'Fraid so." She smiled. "I'm afraid we'll be receiving a telephone call from your appalling superior in London ere the day is out."

Whereupon, as if by some form of telepathy, there came an insistent ringing sound from the interior of the house. Long years of inconvenient interruption had taught Bognor to recognize the particularly shrill, staccato tone of his boss, Parkinson's, telephone calls.

"You answer it," he pleaded. "Tell him I'm out. Or in conference. Tell him I'm swimming. Anything. Just don't let me talk to him."

"Darling," said Monica, "you're so silly. You know perfectly well that he won't give up. You might as well get it over now. Put down your muffin and talk to him."

Bognor growled something unintelligible and hoisted himself from the capacious wicker chair. He might have known it was unwise to come abroad for a holiday. Abroad invariably spelt trouble. He would have done much better to have spent his uncle's little legacy on a couple of much-needed new suits and taken a fortnight in a bed-and-breakfast in Bournemouth. Millionaire waste-disposal magnates did not go missing believed slain in Bournemouth.

"Hello," he said into the telephone.

"Ah, Bognor," came his boss's rasping vowels. They sounded disturbingly close.

"Yes. It's me. Where are you?"

"Relax, Bognor. I am three thousand miles away in the nation's capital. We have the Atlantic Ocean between us."

"Well, that's a relief. You sound as if you're next door. Marvels of modern science. How's the weather?"

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"I did not telephone in order to discuss the climate," said Parkinson, "though in point of fact it is raining. I take it you've heard the news?"

"About Kartofelpeffer?"

"Brilliant!" Parkinson's sarcasm crossed the Atlantic intact and scathing. "North America is obviously having a stimulating effect on your grey matter. Naturally, since the murder took place within a few miles of your present abode I have no alternative but to ask you to liaise with our American cousins."

"Are you sure it's murder?" Bognor was determined to evade any responsibility if humanly possible.

"He was out in a boat. Some sort of rubber canoe. It had been slashed with a knife."

"Oh." Bognor had to concede that this did suggest some form of foul play. "The local rag says 'missing believed slain,' " he said. "Do we have no body?"

"No, no body. Not as yet. They're still dragging the lake."

"I see." Bognor always said this when he was at a complete loss for words and had only the dimmest notion of what was going on. "And you are sure this is a matter for the Board of Trade?"

"Bognor, you know perfectly well that we've been investigating Kartofelpeffer for months. Of course it's a Board of Trade matter."

This was true. Some years before, Mr. Kartofelpeffer, an American gentleman of German extraction, had persuaded the British government to part with several million pounds in order to build a factory outside Liverpool. The area was depressed, unemployment was high, and Mr. Kartofelpeffer—Otto von Kartofelpeffer to be strictly accurate—was plausible. He also had credentials which suggested that though wayward and eccentric he might be some sort of genius.

His waste-disposal truck was a revolutionary machine which grabbed people's garbage bags with a sort of bionic arm and then "ate" them. It greatly reduced, if it did not altogether eliminate, the need for municipal dumping grounds. There was no doubt the truck was brilliant in design and conception. It was ahead of its time—too far ahead of its time. Several broke down on trials. The costs escalated. There were labor disputes. Otto von Kartofelpeffer was rumored to have links with the mob. He featured in a rather messy show-biz divorce case as a very guilty party. And every six months or so the British tax payer was induced to part with another few

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hundreds of thousands of pounds. Hence the Board of Trade investigation.

"Righty ho then," said Bognor, putting a brave face on it, "I suppose I'd better take a shufti over to police headquarters and see what's going on. Any clues?"

"Apart from the canoe," said Parkinson, "the only evidence so far is a ridiculous hat."

It *was* a ridiculous hat.

Bognor gazed at it long and hard. The main part, the bit that actually fitted the head, was sensible enough. It was made from quite ordinary white cloth and was plain. It was the appendages which were so ridiculous. From the left side there protruded the rear end of a fish. It was silver and scaley. The front half of the fish stuck out of the right side of the hat. In one ear and out the other. Supremely ridiculous.

"And this was found near the canoe?" Bognor said, not for the first time.

The plainclothesman from some obscure department of, Bognor thought, the F.B.I. nodded.

"Yuh," he said.

"I see." Bognor pursed his lips. Something was stirring in his subconscious. "And still no body?"

"Nope." The agent, policeman, or whatever he was had made no secret of his resentment of Bognor's sudden incursion. He had been ordered from on high to cooperate with the man from the British Board of Trade but he didn't like it. Ever since his ancestors had left Ireland during the famine, the family had nurtured their hatred of the British. As far as he was concerned it was men like Bognor who had driven his people from their homes.

"Isn't that rather peculiar?"

"Lake's kinda dirty. Lotta weed."

"Mmmm."

Bognor had a strange feeling that he had seen the hat before. Later when he had returned to the cottage and was sitting on the beach with a dry martini and Monica, he told her about it.

"And that's the only clue?" she inquired.

"Seems to be," said Bognor.

"A child's hat."

"Yes."

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"But why would Otto von Kartofelpeffer have a child's hat with him when he was out canoeing?"

"He didn't. It was someone else's hat."

"The murderer's hat?"

"Don't be ridiculous. You're supposed to help at times like this. I have a feeling I've seen the hat before but I can't place it. Have you seen it?"

"A cap with a fish through it? I'm not sure. I don't think so." Monica swirled martini round her mouth. "I'm going to swim," she said, "and think about it."

Bognor watched as she waded out into the pond and plunged into a surprisingly competent crawl. She was getting rather broad in the beam, he reflected, but he was hardly one to talk. Middle-age and muffins were creeping up on both of them with a horrid inexorability. He drank some more martini and tried to remember where he had seen the hat. Presently his wife, who had swum off into the next-door bay, came back into sight, breaststroking.

"It wasn't at Barnstable, was it?" she called.

"What?"

"The hat, stupid."

Bognor considered. They had taken a picnic to a beach outside Barnstable on the second day of their trip. A dank, drizzling sort of day. There had been people on the beach and in boats. Families. Children. Had a child been wearing such a hat? If so, was it relevant? If so, how? The American police and special investigators had told him such hats were relatively commonplace in the States, though he personally had never come across one before.

"What do they think?" Monica emerged from the water like a stately matronly version of the birth of Venus and shook the water out of her hair.

"If by *they* you mean my American colleagues, they seem to think it's a mob job."

"Mafia?"

"Precisely so."

Monica refilled her glass from the thermos stuck in the sand. A few yards away on a neighboring jetty a family of tiny turtles were sunning themselves. This was the life, Bognor thought. The weather had finally turned Mediterranean. The waters of the lake were deepest blue and deserted. Every prospect pleased except for the niggling matter of the death of Otto von Kartofelpeffer.

"I can't help feeling," he said, stretching his toes and wiggling

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them thoughtfully, "that they're not trying terribly hard. I think they're happy just to mark it down as one of those crimes which are never technically solved even though everyone knows perfectly well whodunit. They aren't going to get embroiled in the whole mess of trying to bust the underworld for the sake of a man most people are only too happy to see the last of."

"What do *you* think?" Monica sat down beside him and put an arm round his shoulder.

"I'm not happy with it," he said. "It's too obvious. Otto's in trouble. He has debts. He's embroiled with a lot of really dangerous professional crooks."

Bognor took another sip of his drink and chewed meditatively on the lemon peel. "So he comes over here for a bit of a holiday and to do some business on the side. One morning he goes out to do some canoeing. He is followed by one or more hit-men who wait until he's in the middle of the lake and then sink his boat, either leaving him to drown or maybe helping him on his way with some thrusts of the obviously very sharp knife which punctured the canoe. Simple."

"Very," agreed Monica.

"Too simple," said Bognor.

"Maybe."

"I'd like a body."

"Mmm." Monica tightened her grasp of his shoulder and bit his neck, not altogether playfully.

"I didn't mean that," said Bognor, biting her back. "And then there's the hat."

"The hat," said Monica. And then, "You know, darling, it's quite hot and I feel quite drowsy and I do think we should be careful not to get sunburnt. I wonder if it wouldn't be sensible to go up to the cottage for a little and have a bit of a—"

"Mmmm," said Bognor, kissing her. He got slowly to his feet and picked up the thermos.

An hour or so later, back on the beach, Monica was taking photographs of Bognor swimming. Bognor was no Mark Spitz. He protested, swallowing water in the process.

"O.K., O.K.," she said when he started splashing water at her. "All over. Film's finished."

"Finished?" Bognor was incredulous. "How many pictures?"

"Twenty-four."

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"Twenty-four? You haven't taken twenty-four snapshots of my breaststroke!"

"It's not a breaststroke, it's a geriatric dogpaddle," said Monica, "and of course it's not worth twenty-four pictures. I have, however, been taking a few surreptitious shots of you these past days. Drinking your martini on the beach, stuffing your face with a cold clam sandwich, paddling on the beach at Barnstable. Quite a full dossier."

"I hadn't realized," said Bognor.

"That's because you're self-obsessed."

"On the contrary." Bognor was hurt. "If I *was* self-obsessed I would have noticed." He paused. "How many did you take at Barnstable?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. Half a dozen. Maybe more. Maybe less."

"Just of me, or were there other people?"

"You see, you *are* self-obsessed. Of course they were of you. You're my husband. There may be one or two odds and sods floating about in the background but you're in the center of screen, close-up. Satisfied?"

"No," said Bognor huffily. "I'm not self-obsessed, I'm hat-obsessed. If you must know, I can't get it out of my mind. I'm beginning to be quite certain I have seen that hat somewhere and I'm beginning to think it was in Barnstable."

"So what if you did?"

"I don't know. —Correction, I half know. If I did see the hat, then I assume I saw what was under the hat. And if I can identify the face under the hat, then we may have found an important witness to the crime."

"But you can't remember seeing the hat, let alone the person wearing it."

"Which is why, foolish woman, I'm interested in your photographs. Supposing I'm right and the hat was in Barnstable. Then maybe it's in the background of one of your photographs."

"Possible" said Monica, frowning, "but unlikely. *I* don't remember the hat."

Despite his wife's protests, Bognor insisted on driving into Hyannis immediately and finding a drugstore where they would print the film in twenty-four hours. He didn't consult the official investigating team for fear of appearing foolish. They were still dragging the lake in a desultory way. Bognor felt they were not dragging the lake with nearly as much enthusiasm as they were dragging their feet.

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Next day he and Monica collected the photographs and adjourned to an ice-cream parlor to peruse them over a couple of hot-fudge sundaes. The first few were of Bognor swimming. Monica laughed a little too loudly over these, but Bognor ignored her and them. Instead he thumbed through until he reached the pictures of him, grey-flannel trousers rolled to his knees, paddling on Barnstable beach.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Got it! Eureka!"

"What?" Monica was still smirking over her husband's flabby white porkiness.

"The hat," said Bognor, "I think I've found the hat. Look." And he handed her a picture of himself looking comically English as the waves lapped about his blue-veined hairless calves. In the background to the left was a motor launch with two powerful outboard motors. It appeared to be moving very slowly, if at all, because no wash fanned out from the stern and the four people on board were sharply defined and in focus.

At the wheel of the boat was a very tall man in a pink kaftan. He had a long pepper-and-salt beard and wore a white skullcap on the back of his head. Seated in wicker chairs behind him were a man and a woman in late middle-age and dark-blue sweaters of a vaguely nautical cut. But Bognor's attention was riveted by none of these. He was concentrating exclusively on the small boy sitting between them. He was wearing a white cap from which there protruded two silver ears.

"That's it," he said. "The fish-sandwich hat."

"Are you sure? It looks more like a Viking helmet to me."

"I'll bet you a bottle of Bollinger those are the two halves of a fish."

"Make it Veuve Clicquot and you're on."

"O.K. You're on." Bognor shoveled some fudge sundae into his mouth. He had always been skeptical about American food and drink, but he was beginning to think it had its points. The English muffin. The dry martini. The hot-fudge sundae. "Now what we have to do is track down the hat and establish the identity of the wearer. Who looks"—he screwed his eyes up and glared at the picture—"about seven years old."

"And how do we do that? The Cape must be crawling with seven-year-olds."

"But not, my dear Monica, with seven-foot-tall bearded gentlemen in pink kaftans."

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"Possibly not."

"Indubitably not. How's your sundae?"

"Scrummy."

"Look." Bognor pointed to the side of the bearded gentleman's boat. "The boat has a name. I suggest we eat up and then dash down to the harbormaster in Barnstable and confront him with this. Can you read it? It looks like MUR-something. French perhaps? What do you think?"

Monica's sight was better than his, which was beginning to go. Soon he would have to wear spectacles.

"No," she said, peering, "not French. Japanese. *Murasaki.*"

"Ah," said Bognor sagely. "The well-known Japanese drink."

Monica kicked him under the table. "Fool!" she said. "Lady Murasaki. The one who wrote the Tale of Genji. Ninth, tenth century. Shikibu Murasaki."

"I see," said Bognor.

The harbormaster was most helpful. Barnstable harbor, though crammed with opulent fishing vessels top-heavy with radar, television aerials, viewing platforms, and harpoons, is tiny. The harbormaster knew everyone and he certainly knew the good ship *Murasaki* and her majestic owner.

"Sure," he said, scarcely bothering to glance at Monica's little snap. "That's Lord Cabbagetown."

"Lord Cabbagetown?" Bognor cudgeled his brain, trying to dredge up the memories of gossip columns of yesteryear. He dimly recalled some scandal which had caused Lord Cabbagetown to emigrate. Something to do with Tallulah Bankhead? Had he been a friend of Noel Coward? He seemed to remember that a sofa came into it somehow.

"The Cabbagetown Castle murder," hissed Monica. "Twenty-five years ago at least. The minister and the model drowned in the moat. They tried to pin it on the butler but he got off. Lord Cabbagetown went abroad because of the scandal. It was way before our time."

"And here he is on the Cape. Do you imagine he had anything to do with Otto's death?" Bognor also whispered, though the harbormaster seemed quite uninterested in their conversation and busied himself with a deep pile of what looked like license-application forms. He was smoking a pipe.

"Where would we find Lord Cabbagetown?" asked Bognor.

The harbormaster didn't bother to remove his pipe. "Third house

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on the left down the lane," he said. "You can't miss it because of the flag: green and white."

"Thanks awfully," said Bognor.

The house was typical of the Cape: white clapboard, black shutters, a small plaque over the front door with *1782* inscribed in black. The flag was enormous and consisted of a green cabbage on a white ground with supporters (a gryphon and a lion). Underneath was the motto, *No sin except stupidity*.

Bognor rang the rope which hung from a heavy brass bell. Almost immediately the door was opened by the large bearded figure from the photograph. He had changed from his kaftan into a dark-blue T-shirt with BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD across the chest. He also wore a pair of baggy khaki shorts. Otherwise nothing.

"Lord Cabbagetown?" asked Bognor.

"I am he," said Lord Cabbagetown, looking down on Bognor in a kindly but somewhat supercilious manner. "And to whom am *I* speaking?"

"Simon Bognor of the Board of Trade."

"Of the *British* Board of Trade, I presume?"

"Yes," said Bognor, "and this is Monica."

"Also of the British Board of Trade?"

"No. I'm Monica Bognor."

Lord Cabbagetown said he was pleased to meet her. He did not, however, invite them in, and showed no sign of doing so.

"I wonder," said Bognor, "if you can help. We need to establish the identity of the small boy wearing the hat in this picture."

Lord Cabbagetown held the picture for some moments. At length he said, "And what, pray, is your interest in the child's identity?"

"I think," said Bognor, "we may have found his hat."

"Ha. How kind. You have it with you? I see no need to establish the identity as you so quaintly put it. I can make sure the hat is returned to him."

"Well," said Bognor, "I'm afraid it's not as simple as that. The hat is in police custody."

Lord Cabbagetown frowned. "The hat has been arrested? Pray why?"

"Well" said Bognor, rather desperately, "the fact of the matter is that the hat was found near the scene of a crime and we have reason to believe—"

"That the hat's owner is a criminal? Come, come, Mr. Eastbourne."

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"Bognor actually."

"Oh, very well, Bognor." A hint of exasperation crossed his Lordship's already purpling visage. "You aren't seriously suggesting that a seven-year-old child has committed a criminal offense?"

"No. But he may have seen one being committed."

"Ah."

A long silence. Eventually Lord Cabbagetown said, "Do you have ID?" A few years of American domicile had, thought Bognor, wrought havoc with five hundred years' inheritance of the Queen's English. Small wonder that Monica had succumbed so swiftly.

"Sure, I have ID," said Bognor, producing his Board of Trade card with the Queen's picture and the verbose italic message from Her Majesty's President of the Board of Trade.

Lord Cabbagetown produced an eyeglass from the back pocket of the khaki shorts and scrutinized the document.

"Very well," he said, "the boy's name is Henry Witherspoon Three. He is staying with his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Witherspoon, who live on Santuit Pond at Mashpee."

"How do we find them?" asked Bognor.

"It's quite a small pond," said Lord Cabbagetown, suddenly weary. "There is one road and not more than a dozen cottages. Their name is displayed quite prominently upon the mailbox." He paused. "As is the American custom," he said. And slammed the door, and was gone.

"Rum cove," said Bognor.

"In a nutshell," agreed his wife.

It took three-quarters of an hour and a couple of wrong turnings to drive to Mashpee and locate the rough track which led through the woods to Santuit Pond.

"How far away from here was Otto done in?" asked Monica.

"His canoe was found at Quahog Pond," Bognor said. "I don't know how far that is."

They had driven for almost two miles along the muddy and very bumpy track, hemmed in by thick woods of pine, beech, and scrub, when they suddenly came into an open clearing. To the left a modest cranberry bog bordered the lake and immediately in front of them on a small hill there was a cluster of cottages, all of different design, half hidden by trees. The track curled round this knoll and they followed it, reading off the names on the letter boxes until at the

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fifth they struck gold in the form of the words HENRY AND GRACE WITHERSPOON.

Bognor pulled in to the side of the lane and the two of them got out and walked up the little drive to the house. There was a screened porch running the entire length of the house. Another, unscreened, ran along the top of it at the second-floor level. On this there sat a man and a woman reading newspapers. They were the couple in the photograph.

"Hi!" said the man, lowering his paper and regarding them through the top of his bifocals. "Can I help?"

"I hope so," said Bognor. "Are you Henry Witherspoon?"

"I certainly am," said the man. "Have been for almost sixty years now. What part of England are you from?"

"London, actually. My name's Bognor."

"Grace and I spent a weekend in Bognor only last year. Liked it very much, only it rained from Friday evening through Sunday lunch. How can I help you, Mr. Bognor?"

"Is your grandson staying with you?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"I think I may have found his hat."

"His hat?"

"Didn't he have a hat with a fish through it?"

"Yeah. And he lost it the other day. We've been trying to find him a replacement but it seems there's a national shortage of hats with fish through them. It was a *ridiculous* hat." He chuckled. "But kinda funny. And little Henry was deeply attached to it. How come you knew it was his?"

"It's a long story," said Bognor who had formed the intuitive impression that Mr. Witherspoon was a person of integrity and honesty. "If you let me in, I'll tell it to you."

Fifteen minutes later the Bognors and the Witherspoons were walking rapidly down to their private beach where Henry Three was supposedly playing.

"I do hope he's not in any sort of danger," said his grandmother.

"I can't help thinking the worst danger is past," said Bognor. "If the murderer had realized Henry was watching, there might have been a second—tragedy. As it is, I think we may assume the murderer or murderers didn't realize he was there. Or decided to take a risk. It's one thing to kill a man like Otto von Kartofelpeffer, quite another to murder an innocent seven-year-old child."

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"Always assuming he lost his hat at the same time the murder was committed," said Henry Witherspoon the First. "That's an awfully big assumption."

"My whole professional career is based on assumptions like that turning out to be correct," said Bognor. "When it comes to crime, I believe that ratiocination is much overestimated. It's gut feelings that count, not grey matter."

Behind him, Monica snorted with derisive laughter.

"My husband and I make a strong team," she said. "He has the hunches and I subject them to rigorous intellectual analysis. I don't believe you can have one without the other."

Mr. and Mrs. Witherspoon laughed, partly at the remark, partly because they could see that Henry Three was safe and well and building an elaborate sand castle.

"Hi, Henry!" shouted his grandfather. "These good people have come all the way from England to find your hat."

Very seriously, even gravely, the elder Henry Witherspoon performed introductions and little Henry shook hands.

"Mr. Bognor here wants to ask you a few questions, Henry." Mr. Witherspoon motioned to the aluminum-framed chairs scattered about the sand. "So let's all sit down and be comfortable."

They duly sat. It was very quiet. The only sound was the lapping of water and the gentle bump of the Witherspoon rowboat as it rocked against the jetty. There was no one on or in the lake, and gazing across to the far shore about half a mile away Bognor could see no sign of human habitation. It was on just such a pond, he presumed, that Otto von Kartofelpeffer had met his end.

"Henry," said Bognor gently, "did you lose your hat at Quahog Pond?"

The boy looked at the sand and screwed up his toes.

"That's right, Henry," said Mrs. Witherspoon after the silence had gone on long enough, "remember we went for a picnic and you wandered off when Grandad and I were having a little nap." She turned to Bognor. "We were quite alarmed because when we woke there was no sign of him and he didn't answer when we called. We found him after about fifteen minutes. He was running. He seemed awfully distressed."

"And you'd lost your hat?"

The boy stuck his thumbnail in his mouth and bit into it. He continued to stare at the ground but he did nod.

"You don't have to be frightened," said Bognor, "no one will hurt

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you. We're all friends. I just want you to tell me what you saw. That's all."

Another silence.

Bognor tried again. "Henry," he said, "you'd like your hat back, wouldn't you?"

Henry kept chewing his thumbnail, contemplating this strange English person. He nodded.

"Well, if you tell me what you saw," said Bognor, "you get your hat back. But if you don't tell me, the police will have to keep the hat."

Henry stopped chewing his nail. "The police have my hat?"

"Yes, Henry, they do."

"Why do the police have my hat?"

"The police have your hat because they found it near a canoe. The canoe was wrecked and they're afraid the man who was paddling it got killed. They think the person who was wearing the hat—that's you, Henry—saw what happened to the man. And they need to know what happened to him. If you do know, then you should tell me."

The boy made patterns in the sand with his toes. Eventually he said, "Is that right, Grandad?"

"Yes, Henry, that's right" said his grandfather.

And then it all came tumbling out. How he'd wandered off after lunch while his grandparents slept, how he'd come upon this man standing up to his knees in water, hacking away systematically at a rubber canoe. The man had seemed startled and upset to see him. He had made Henry promise not to tell a soul. He had given him a ten-dollar bill to keep quiet. Then he'd abandoned the canoe and half walked, half swum across the lake to a little spit of land about a hundred yards away. When he'd watched the man vanish in the woods, Henry had turned and run. Which was how his hat must have fallen off.

"Could you show me exactly where he went?" asked Bognor.

The boy nodded. "Do I get my hat back?"

"Of course," said Bognor, "and you can keep the ten dollars."

The police found Otto later that day. It took time for Bognor to persuade them to stop dragging the pond for a corpse and to start combing the woods for a live body, but they finally acquiesced. The little cabin was hidden away among the trees, miles from anywhere, and when they kicked the door in, Otto was asleep in a sleeping bag surrounded by enough cans of corned beef and grapefruit segments

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to keep him going for a month or more. He had been hoping, it transpired at the trial, to lie low until the furor died down, then make a break for it and start a new life somewhere different. Australia seemed to be his first choice.

"Parkinson was really rather generous," said Bognor after his boss had telephoned congratulations. "On previous occasions when people have faked their own deaths, he said it's sometimes taken years to find them. And cost thousands of pounds. So he's quite pleased. In fact, he's said I can take an extra two days' holiday."

"Big deal," said Monica. "Did you tell him how you solved it?"

"No," said Bognor, "I thought it best to preserve an element of mystery. In any case, he didn't ask. I think he knew he wouldn't like the answer."

Monica took another sip of the celebratory Veuve Clicquot, for which, according to the terms of their bet, she had paid. "Henry Witherspoon Three did seem pleased," she said. "I wonder if his parents *will* have it put in a glass case for him."

"Best place for it," said Bognor. "It was never meant for putting on the head."

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a *NEW* story about Pete's Place by

ROBERT TWOHY

A tale about ghost-days, written with Robert Twohy's extraordinary vision and remarkable use of language . . .

WHAT'S TO MISS?

by ROBERT TWOHY

Sweeney sat on the bench in front of the bus depot, like Terrell had seen him a hundred times. Old jacket, worn grey pants, pink drinker's face, eyes sly and amused—he hadn't changed a bit in two years.

He waggled a finger, same old high-sign. "Hi, Ed."

"Hi, Sween." Terrell sat down by him. Looked at his thick, splotchy hand on his knee. Same old hand. Same old knee. Same old Sweeney.

A woman said, "D'you know when the Palo Alto bus comes?"

She was standing the other side of Sweeney, looking at Terrell like she didn't see Sweeney. So Terrell told her, "Ten minutes maybe." She nodded and stood there by the door of the depot, closed at this hour, 8:00 P.M. on a clear summer eve, frowning down Washington Drive.

Terrell said, "You invisible?" He spoke low but the woman heard that he'd spoken and asked, "What was that?"

"I said sometimes it runs late."

She nodded and frowned down the Drive some more.

Sweeney said, "Not to you. Not tonight."

The woman didn't turn, so it seemed she couldn't hear Sweeney any better than she could see him.

Terrell couldn't figure why tonight Sweeney was sitting here, just like he'd used to, two years after his funeral. Terrell hadn't attended

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the last rites at National Cemetery in San Bruno, but some guys had told him that Sweeney had gone down as scheduled.

A routine sendoff for a vet of no consequence, fifty-eight years old, corporal in the South Pacific in WW II, then a milk-truck driver, then a school maintenance-man, married, four or five spawn, then divorced. Barroom regular, good shuffleboard player, part-time bookie—good guy, wry sense of humor, mostly on himself. Died of stomach ills brought on by booze, which would be Terrell's story, too. Nothing strange about Sweeney's death. But him sitting here this June eve, looking like always—*that* was strange.

The woman being so close, Terrell didn't want to start talking—she'd think he was a nut. He had no standing in Lindenvale, being a cab driver, but would as soon not be considered a nut. Which he was to a degree, but tried not to advertise it.

So he got up and moved across the triangular patch of sparse grass to the Loffland Street side, where the northbound bus stopped, and there was another bench, and sat down. In a minute Sweeney came and sat down by him.

Terrell said, "How come?"

"How come what?"

Terrell reached, touched the splotchy hand, which felt warm, like a normal live hand—but that didn't prove anything, he could be hallucinating the warmth.

Sweeney had that wry glint in his brown eyes. Terrell asked, "What's it like?"

"Oh—you know."

Terrell shook his head. He didn't.

Sweeney stretched back on the bench, threw a leg topside. He looked relaxed and pretty totally satisfied with life, or death.

Terrell looked away, thinking things over. He'd quit drinking last year when his stomach blew up, but a DT might have got snagged in some brain hairs, just now surfacing, which was why Sweeney was here when he really wasn't. So Terrell would fix his thoughts on that—that Sweeney really *wasn't*—then snap a cagey look and the bench beside him would be vacant. So he did, but it wasn't.

How come, he thought, I see him tonight and never did before, since he died?

A little guy was strutting along the other side of Loffland. Terrell thought he recognized the strut, and the suit—which wasn't likely. But neither was Sweeney.

Sweeney called, "Sal!"

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The guy stopped, looked, hustled across. Trademark old-style, pinstriped dark suit, familiar wiseguy smirk. "Hi, Sween! Edmund, nice to see you."

Terrell thought, Sal DeSicily—dead four years. He'd drove him to Chope Hospital, Sal rasping like a rusty hinge from emphysema. A week later he was dead. Now here he was feisty and bigtownish as ever, Brooklyn's gift to Lindenvale. Same old Sal.

"I'm on my way to Pete's." He held a square paper package, which he gestured with. "Told George I'd bring him some cheese." Sal's hobby had always been cooking and brewing up stuff—he used to make very tasty Italian cheese, among other good things.

But Pete's Place had closed last September and George, the owner, son of the long-departed Pete, had moved from Lindenvale to his ranch in Portola Valley—or so Terrell had heard, and hadn't seen him since. He asked, "Is George dead, too?"

Sal looked surprised. "Not that I know. Have you heard something?"

"No."

"He's okay, far's I know. You guys want to come along?"

Sweeney got up. Terrell did, too, but said, "This isn't real. You two floated up from my underbrain where you'd got stuck. You were both good guys and I liked you. We had some very pleasant times at Pete's, which is why I'm hallucinating all this. But it's over, all over. Pete's is down the tube and—"

Sal growled, impatient as always, "You coming or not?" and turned and strutted off, Sweeney moving with him. Terrell trotted on aging legs and caught up with them where Loffland hooks into the Drive, at the new bar there, and stopped and called, "See?" pointing to the stylish new sign over the door.

A guy approaching, a business type with glasses, looked at him hard, and slowed and stopped as he said, loud, "It's not Gloria's any more, it's State Bar and Grill. Things change. Pete's Place isn't any more, it's not even a bar any more, George sold the building—you're way behind on what's been happening."

Then, the business guy, who had maneuvered out to the edge of the sidewalk as Terrell talked on about hallucination, muttered, "Whatever's right," and slid on by, keeping an eye on him.

Sal said in a friendly way, "Stop babbling, Edmund," which he'd often said in drunken times past.

They all walked down the Drive, turned at the Avenue, walked

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to Haskell, and turned right, Terrell not knowing why he was going along, just going along. Ahead, the tall plaster construction that had used to support the green neon sign proclaiming pridefully, PETE'S PLACE, still loomed, but a different sign was on it, non-neon and constrained—HERMAX REALTY. "See?" Terrell said. "It's not Pete's any more."

"Yeah, it is," said Sal. Sweeney nodded.

"You'll see when we get to the door," Terrell told them. It was steel-and-glass, not the old wood dutch-door they'd all been so used to pushing through—and at this hour the new door would be locked.

They got to it and Terrell snarled, "Satisfied?"

Sweeney took his arm and Terrell didn't know why the door wasn't locked, but it wasn't it seemed, and they just walked in—and what Terrell had seen through the door, new walls and rugs and office stalls, weren't there when he got inside. It was just like it had been for all the nineteen years he'd come there—and for thirty years before that, he'd heard, since the late Pete had opened it in 1934.

Just the same—old and dank, fumes of booze and wine and beer coming off the flaking, sick-green plaster walls, the old double door, scrappy black linoleum underfoot, big framed portrait of F.D.R., N.R.A. and other Thirties posters, all just as old Pete had bequeathed it to George. Brownish signed photos of Coast League ball players who'd got plastered here in the old days. No jukebox. A wood shuffleboard table that would be an antique if not a lopsided piece of junk. A reasonably true pool table. Tall ragged stools. And perched on them along the dark bar many people Terrell knew, not dead. Adolph and Rose, and Jack Taylor, and old Smittworth (who *was* dead). And Mullaney, and Scott, and Joe Slonsky (who was dead, too). And other people Terrell didn't know. He thought, How could some be dead and some not be, and all of them sitting here, drinking and chatting together?

Sal handed George his cheese package, and chatted with him. Sweeney had drifted off. Terrell went over to Slonsky, who'd died age thirty-two in '79. Joe grinned and said it was nice to see him.

"You're dead, aren't you, Joe?"

"Have a drink."

"I've stopped drinking."

"Have a Calistoga then. George!"

George, bulky and formidable, grey hair cut just like when he was a Marine sergeant, spic and span in a French-cuffed white shirt like

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he operated the elegantest dump on the Peninsula, came down the bar. Terrell asked, "Are *you* dead, George?"

"I hope not."

"Am I?"

"I dunno. Are you?"

"I don't think so—how come you're here?"

"Where else would I be?"

Someone cried, "Edsie!" She had huge lavender eyes and bright orange hair—she was Rose, who had been a belle from childhood and well into the time Terrell had known her—a belle from New Jersey. She came into his arms and she was warm and smelled sweet and breathed soft breaths on him. He said, "You're not dead, are you?"

"Who said I was?"

"Where did you move?"

"Nowhere. I'm still at the hotel."

"I heard you'd moved to your daughter's."

"She's asked me—but no way. What would I do in Oakdale?"

She smooched him some more. He loved the brightness of her eyes.

Sal said, "Want to shoot a game?"

"No."

"Hi, Salvatore," said Rose, and smooched him.

"Hi, Rose."

Terrell asked, when Rose sashayed down the bar to love up somebody else, "Does she know you're dead?"

"Rose? I guess not. Are you sure you don't want to shoot a game?"

"I'm sure. Has time stopped here?"

Sal gave him a talk-to-you-later wink and marched off to drum up a game.

Sweeney was at the shuffleboard table with a strange-looking specimen Terrell didn't know with a face like a sheep and an overcoat the color of dirty chocolate dragging on the floor.

A Calistoga was in front of him and ice in a glass, with a lime wedge. He poured into the glass. It tasted like Calistogas he'd had here before, between binges. He said to Joe, "D'you miss anything?"

"What's to miss?"

"You look the same. No, you don't. You look better."

"I stopped worrying."

"About your heart, you mean?"

"About anything."

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Terrell asked, "Is time frozen here?"

"D'you want a sandwich?"

"No." Terrell watched Sal line up a shot on the table. He was playing Bennett. They had been the two top poolsharks in Lindenvale. Bennett had been a pro in the south. He was dead, too.

Sal banked, rhythmic and easy as ever, and the 8-ball crept to the side pocket, sighed, and fell in. Bennett shook his head, growled a compliment, dropped a coin in the slot, and went to the trough at the end to pull out the balls and rack up.

Terrell took his glass and walked down the bar to Taylor. Taylor was in his low thirties, a fellow cab driver and old friend, and not dead. In fact, Terrell had had coffee with him at the doughnut shop last Monday. Terrell said, "D'you know that a certain number of people sitting around here today are dead?"

Taylor laughed, thinking Terrell was making some kind of dumb joke, and being polite. "Calistoga, huh? Hung over?"

"No, I've quit drinking. You know that."

Taylor grinned, like he didn't know it and couldn't conceive it. "Haven't seen you for a while."

"You saw me three days ago."

Taylor shook his head. "More like three weeks. Where have you been hiding?"

Terrell got a glimmer of something. "What's the date?"

"June eighteen."

"What year?"

Taylor laughed.

"No, I mean it. I've gone blank all of a sudden. What year?"

"Seventy-six."

"Oh."

So if Taylor was telling the truth like he knew it, which it seemed that he was, all these people were ghosts, the living as well as the dead—ghosts of people who'd stopped in and sat and drunk, gossiped, joked, and played on the eighteenth day of June, 1976. Seven years ago. They'd moved on to other scenes, or died, but the day remained—and maybe all the other ghost-days at Pete's remained, too.

It didn't make sense—but why should it? Terrell was glad to be here, to see these friends who had died or moved or changed into other people—like *he* had changed, in the years since, into another person.

He heard clicking at the front door. It opened, and it wasn't

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George's old wood door but the new steel-and-glass door. The two guys who came in were business guys in suits. One was thick, in his middle years, amiable-looking. The other was slim, dark, young, tense-looking. They moved briskly across the linoleum and didn't seem to notice the bar, the pool table, or any of the people—the mild din of talk and laughter. They moved sort of through the pool table, paying no mind that Bennett was shooting, and there was a stall with a desk and chairs beyond the table that Terrell hadn't noticed before, though it must have been there all the time. People at the bar weren't observing the two guys and Bennett hadn't seemed aware of them as he stroked through his shot, but Terrell saw Sweeney glance at Sal with his wry smile, and Sal had a tight little smile, too, but what the smiles meant, if anything, Terrell didn't know.

The bar clatter went on as the amiable man sat at the desk and took from a drawer some papers, which he gave to the dark man, who slid them into a briefcase, from which he took a pistol—and fired.

After the sharp crack, it was only silence behind Terrell and around. He didn't hear anyone move, but knew that all had gone—there was nobody but him and the man fallen on the desk and the man with the gun. And it wasn't Pete's Place any more. The pool table and shuffleboard were gone, Sal and Bennett, Sweeney and the sheep guy were gone. Terrell stood on a clean green carpet looking into an office stall, one of many in the realty office.

The young guy turned and saw him. He had shiny eyes full of fear. Terrell stood still. The guy came out of the office to him. Terrell said something, maybe "Don't," something like that. The guy did, though. Terrell had known by his eyes that he would.

Falling, he thought, Okay, I'm fifty-two and I've had a life. I did the things I could, more or less—kids grown and gone, old friends gone, Pete's Place gone, good times gone, new stomach pains in spite of no booze for a year, the I.R.S. on my tail and others after me for money I don't have. Okay, I've drove cab long enough, I guess. Check-out time—

He never learned what the cops thought, finding him on the floor of Hermax Realty. Maybe they thought he was the killer. Maybe the tense young guy had seized the moment—wiped the pistol, put it in Terrell's hand, got the dead guy's wallet, poked it into Terrell's pocket, and slid out, leaving the door open. Maybe Terrell was down

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in Lindenvale police records as a murderer who got instant remorse and suicided.

He never learned who the young killer was, or why he'd shot the middle-aged guy.

—Rose said, "You look good in that jacket."

Terrell smiled at her, lady with the lavender eyes. Her hair wasn't orange but light-brown, fixed nice. Her skin looked like it'd be sweet to the taste. She wore a pretty blue dress. She'd never looked better in the years he'd known her.

He sat down by her, reached in his pocket, and felt a wad of money. Casper was on—the morning man. Terrell looked at the clock. It was 10:20. He ordered a highball for Rose. "What's the date, Casper?"

"March six."

"What year?"

"You kidding?"

"Yeah—but what year?"

" 'Sixty-nine."

"That right?" he asked Rose. She nodded.

He saw himself in the stained mirror on the back bar—kind of aimless-looking as always, but not bad—lots of hair, most of it brown, no whiskers, minimum of sags and creases, classy check jacket. He remembered that jacket—he'd been pretty proud of it. He used to give a damn how he dressed. He guessed he'd given a damn that day in '69—*this* day.

Casper said, "What's for you?"

"Calis— No, gimme a bottle of Oly."

He laid money on the bar for the drinks. Casper took a buck, brought back change. Terrell thought, wow—what a great year to be thirty-eight in, in a classy check jacket!

Sweeney came in. "Hi," said Rose. Sweeney gave the hi back and grinned at Terrell with that glint in his eye.

Rose turned to chitter with someone her other side. Terrell said to Sweeney, "I'm dead now, too."

Sweeney murmured, "That so?"

"Is that why you and Sal brought me here June 18, 1983, a little past 8:00 P.M.?"

"Come again?"

"So I'd be here when those two guys came in—and would get shot?"

"That how you figure?"

"Well, yeah. That it was on my schedule—and that you and Sal were the escort service, to get me here."

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Sweeney rubbed his jaw and gazed off, looking thoughtful—then shrugged. "Could be, I suppose. How d'you feel?"

"I had a headache but it seems to be gone. Stomach feels fine." He swallowed some Oly. It tasted very good.

Sal came in, greeted one and all, and asked Terrell, "Want to shoot a game?"

Terrell got up, thinking, I'm not so bad. I can shoot a good game now and then—I'm just not consistent.

Sal racked up. Terrell felt he might give him a struggle.

He just needed practice—which he'd never taken time for.

He broke—one of his best breaks ever, three stripes and two solids falling to glory. "Beautiful," said Sal.

Bennett had come in, was watching. "Great start."

Terrell looked at Rose, looking beautiful, smiling at him.

Time now for a lot of things he'd never got around to.

"Stripes," he called, bending to the pleasant task of running the table—which he'd never done before. But this day, March 6, 1969, he had a feeling he just might—

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies Roy "The Pusher" Howard,
Dealer in dope and practicing coward,
The narc squad staged a sudden raid
On the hotel suite where The Pusher stayed,
And caused him, in his instant fright,
To take to ignominious flight
Through the nearest window—two seconds before
He remembered he lived on the eighteenth floor.

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

There was no point in Christine telling Graham now, ten years too late, that she was afraid of what he did and always had been. Of course she had got used to it, she wasn't actually terrified, she was resigned and sometimes even quite cheerful about it. But David was the only man she had ever been alone with when it felt all right.

Another chilling psychological story from Ruth Rendell, exploring the dark subconscious with clinical objectivity on the one hand and deep compassion on the other . . .

THE NEW GIRL FRIEND

by RUTH RENDELL

"You know what we did last time?" he said.

She had waited for this for weeks. "Yes?"

"I wondered if you'd like to do it again."

She longed to but she didn't want to sound too keen. "Why not?"

"How about Friday afternoon then? I've got the day off and Angie always goes to her sister's on Friday."

"Not *always*, David." She giggled.

He also laughed a little. "She will this week. Do you think we could use your car? Angie'll take ours."

"Of course. I'll come for you about two, shall I?"

"I'll open the garage doors and you can drive straight in. Oh, and Chris, could you fix it to get back a bit later? I'd love it if we could have the whole evening together."

"I'll try," she said, and then, "I'm sure I can fix it. I'll tell Graham I'm going out with my new girl friend."

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He said goodbye and that he would see her on Friday. Christine put the receiver back. She had almost given up expecting a call from him. But there must have been a grain of hope still, for she had never left the receiver off the way she used to.

The last time she had done that was on a Thursday three weeks before, the day she had gone round to Angie's and found David there alone. Christine had got into the habit of taking the phone off the hook during the middle part of the day to avoid getting calls for the Midland Bank. Her number and the Midland Bank's differed by only one digit. Most days she took the receiver off at nine-thirty and put it back at three-thirty. On Thursday afternoons she nearly always went round to see Angie and never bothered to phone first.

Christine knew Angie's husband quite well. If she stayed a bit later on Thursdays she saw him when he came home from work. Sometimes she and Graham and Angie and David went out together as a foursome. She knew that David, like Graham, was a salesman or sales executive, as Graham always described himself, and she guessed from her friend's lifestyle that David was rather more successful at it. She had never found him particularly attractive, for, although he was quite tall, he had something of a girlish look and very fair wavy hair.

Graham was a heavily built, very dark man with a swarthy skin. He had to shave twice a day. Christine had started going out with him when she was fifteen and they had got married on her eighteenth birthday. She had never really known any other man at all intimately and now if she ever found herself alone with a man she felt awkward and apprehensive. The truth was that she was afraid a man might make an advance to her and the thought of that frightened her very much. For a long while she carried a penknife in her handbag in case she should need to defend herself. One evening, after they had been out with a colleague of Graham's and had had a few drinks, she told Graham about this fear of hers.

He said she was silly but he seemed rather pleased.

"When you went off to talk to those people and I was left with John I felt like that. I felt terribly nervous. I didn't know how to talk to him."

Graham roared with laughter. "You don't mean you thought old John was going to make a pass at you in the middle of a crowded restaurant?"

"I don't know," Christine said. "I never know what they'll do."

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"So long as you're not afraid of what I'll do," said Graham, beginning to kiss her, "that's all that matters."

There was no point in telling him now, ten years too late, that she was afraid of what he did and always had been. Of course she had got used to it, she wasn't actually terrified, she was resigned and sometimes even quite cheerful about it. David was the only man she had ever been alone with when it felt all right.

That first time, that Thursday when Angie had gone to her sister's and hadn't been able to get through on the phone and tell Christine not to come, that time it had been fine. And afterwards she had felt happy and carefree, though what had happened with David took on the coloring of a dream next day. It wasn't really believable. Early on he had said:

"Will you tell Angie?"

"Not if you don't want me to."

"I think it would upset her, Chris. It might even wreck our marriage. You see—" He had hesitated. "You see, that was the first time I—I mean, anyone ever—" And he had looked into her eyes. "Thank God it was you."

The following Thursday she had gone round to see Angie as usual. In the meantime there had been no word from David. She stayed late in order to see him, beginning to feel a little sick with apprehension, her heart beating hard when he came in.

He looked quite different from how he had when she had found him sitting at the table reading, the radio on. He was wearing a grey flannel suit and a grey striped tie. When Angie went out of the room and for a minute she was alone with him, she felt a flicker of that old wariness that was the forerunner of her fear. He was getting her a drink. She looked up and met his eyes and it was all right again. He gave her a conspiratorial smile, laying a finger on his lips.

"I'll give you a ring," he had whispered.

She had to wait two more weeks. During that time she went twice to Angie's and twice Angie came to her. She and Graham and Angie and David went out as a foursome and while Graham was fetching drinks and Angie was in the Ladies, David looked at her and smiled and lightly touched her foot with his foot under the table.

"I'll phone you. I haven't forgotten."

It was a Wednesday when he finally did phone. Next day Christine told Graham she had made a new friend, a girl she had met at work.

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She would be going out somewhere with this new friend on Friday and she wouldn't be back till eleven. She was desperately afraid he would want the car—it was *his* car or his firm's—but it so happened he would be in the office that day and would go by train. Telling him these lies didn't make her feel guilty. It wasn't as if this were some sordid affair, it was quite different.

When Friday came she dressed with great care. Normally, to go round to Angie's, she would have worn jeans and a T-shirt with a sweater over it. That was what she had on the first time she found herself alone with David. She put on a skirt and blouse and her black velvet jacket. She took the heated rollers out of her hair and brushed it into curls down on her shoulders. There was never much money to spend on clothes. The mortgage on the house took up a third of what Graham earned and half what she earned at her part-time job. But she could run to a pair of sheer black tights to go with the highest heeled shoes she'd got, her black pumps.

The doors of Angie and David's garage were wide open and their car was gone. Christine turned into their driveway, drove into the garage, and closed the doors behind her. A door at the back of the garage led into the yard and garden. The kitchen door was unlocked as it had been that Thursday three weeks before and always was on Thursday afternoons. She opened the door and walked in.

"Is that you, Chris?"

The voice sounded very male. She needed to be reassured by the sight of him. She went into the hall as he came down the stairs.

"You look lovely," he said.

"So do you."

He was wearing a suit. It was of navy silk with a pattern of pink-and-white flowers. The skirt was very short, the jacket clinched into his waist with a wide navy patent-leather belt. The long golden hair fell to his shoulders. He was heavily made-up and this time he had painted his fingernails. He looked far more beautiful than he had that first time.

Then, that first time, three weeks before, the sound of her entry drowned in loud music from the radio, she had come upon this girl sitting at the table reading *Vogue*. For a moment she had thought it must be David's sister. She had forgotten Angie had said David was an only child. The girl had long fair hair and was wearing a red summer dress with white spots on it, white sandals, and around

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her neck a string of white beads. When Christine saw that it was not a girl but David himself she didn't know what to do.

He stared at her in silence and without moving, and then he switched off the radio. Christine said the silliest and least relevant thing. "What are you doing home at this time?"

That made him smile. "I'd finished, so I took the rest of the day off. I should have locked the back door. Now you're here you may as well sit down."

She sat down. She couldn't take her eyes off him. He didn't look like a man dressed up as a girl, he looked like a girl—and a much prettier one than she or Angie. "Does Angie know?"

He shook his head.

"But why do you do it?" she burst out and she looked about the room, Angie's small, rather untidy living room, at the radio, the *Vogue* magazine. "What do you get out of it?" Something came back to her from an article she had read. "Did your mother dress you as a girl when you were little?"

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe. I don't remember. I don't want to *be* a girl. I just want to dress up as one sometimes."

The first shock of it was past and she began to feel easier with him. It wasn't as if there was anything grotesque about the way he looked. The very last thing he reminded her of was one of those female impersonators. A curious thought came into her head—that it was *nicer,* somehow more civilized, to be a woman and that if only all men were more like women— That was silly, of course, it couldn't be.

"And it's enough for you just to dress up and be here on your own?"

He was silent for a moment. "Since you ask, what I'd really like would be to go out like this and—" he paused, looking at her "—and be seen by lots of people, that's what I'd like. I've never had the nerve for that."

The bold idea expressed itself without her having to give it a moment's thought. She wanted to do it. She was beginning to tremble with excitement.

"Let's go out then, you and I. Let's go out now. I'll put my car in your garage and you can get into it so the people next door don't see and then we'll go somewhere. Let's do that, David, shall we?"

She wondered afterwards why she had enjoyed it so much. What had it been, after all, as far as anyone else knew but two girls

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walking on Hampstead Heath? If Angie had suggested that the two of them do it she would have thought it a poor way of spending the afternoon. But with David— She hadn't even minded that of the two of them he was infinitely the better dressed, taller, better-looking, more graceful. She didn't mind now as he came down the stairs and stood in front of her.

"Where shall we go?"

"Not the Heath this time," he said. "Let's go shopping."

He bought a blouse in one of the big stores. Christine went into the changing room with him when he tried it on. They walked about in Hyde Park. Later on they had dinner and Christine noted that they were the only two women in the restaurant dining together.

"I'm grateful to you," David said. He put his hand over hers on the table.

"I enjoy it," she said. "It's so—crazy. I really love it. You'd better not do that, had you? There's a man over there giving a funny look."

"Women hold hands," he said.

"Only *those* sort of women. David, we could do this every Friday you don't have to work."

"Why not?" he said.

There was nothing to feel guilty about. She wasn't harming Angie and she wasn't being disloyal to Graham. All she was doing was going on innocent outings with another girl. Graham wasn't interested in her new friend, he didn't even ask her name. Christine came to long for Fridays, especially for the moment when she let herself into Angie's house and saw David coming down the stairs, and for the moment when they stepped out of the car in some public place and the first eyes were turned on him. They went to Holland Park, they went to the zoo, to Kew Gardens. They went to the cinema and a man sitting next to David put his hand on his knee. David loved that, it was a triumph for him, but Christine whispered they must change their seats and they did.

When they parted at the end of an evening he kissed her gently on the lips. He smelt of Alliage or Je Reviens or Opium. During the afternoon they usually went into one of the big stores and sprayed themselves out of the tester bottles.

Angie's mother lived in the north of England. When she had to convalesce after an operation Angie went up there to look after her. She expected to be away two weeks and the second weekend of her absence Graham had to go to Brussels with the sales manager.

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"We could go away somewhere for the weekend," David said.

"Graham's sure to phone," Christine said.

"One night then. Just for the Saturday night. You can tell him you're going out with your new girl friend and you're going to be late."

"All right."

It worried her that she had no nice clothes to wear. David had a small but exquisite wardrobe of suits and dresses, shoes and scarves and beautiful underclothes. He kept them in a cupboard in his office to which only he had a key and he secreted items home and back again in his briefcase. Christine hated the idea of going away for the night in her grey-flannel skirt and white-silk blouse and that velvet jacket while David wore his Zandra Rhodes dress. In a burst of recklessness she spent all of two weeks' wages on a linen suit.

They went in David's car. He had made the arrangements and Christine had expected they would be going to a motel twenty miles outside London. She hadn't thought it would matter much to David where they went. But he surprised her by his choice of a hotel that was a three-hundred-year-old house on the Suffolk coast.

"If we're going to do it," he said, "we may as well do it in style."

She felt very comfortable with him, very happy. She tried to imagine what it would have felt like going to spend a night in a hotel with a man, a lover. If the person sitting next to her were dressed not in a black-and-white printed silk dress and scarlet jacket but in a man's suit with shirt and tie. If the face it gave her so much pleasure to look at were not powdered and rouged and mascara'd but rough and already showing beard growth. She couldn't imagine it. Or, rather, she could think only how in that case she would have jumped out of the car at the first red traffic lights.

They had single rooms next door to each other. The rooms were very small, but Christine could see that a double might have been awkward for David, who must at some point—though she didn't care to think of this—have to shave and strip down to being what he really was.

He came in and sat on her bed while she unpacked her nightdress and spare pair of shoes.

"This is fun, isn't it?"

She nodded, squinting into the mirror, working on her eyelids with a little brush. David always did his eyes beautifully. She turned round and smiled at him. "Let's go down and have a drink."

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The dining room, the bar, the lounge were all low-ceilinged timbered rooms with carved wood on the walls David said was called linenfold paneling. There were old maps and pictures of men hunting in gilt frames and copper bowls full of roses. Long windows were thrown open onto a terrace. The sun was still high in the sky and it was very warm. While Christine sat on the terrace in the sunshine David went off to get their drinks. When he came back to their table he had a man with him, a thick-set paunchy man of about forty who was carrying a tray with four glasses on it.

"This is Ted," David said.

"Delighted to meet you," Ted said. "I've asked my friend to join us. I hope you don't mind."

She had to say she didn't. David looked at her and from his look she could tell he had deliberately picked Ted up.

"But why did you?" she said to him afterward. "Why did you want to? You told me you didn't really like it when that man put his hand on you in the cinema."

"That was so physical. This is just a laugh. You don't suppose I'd let them touch me, do you?"

Ted and Peter had the next table to theirs at dinner. Christine was silent and standoffish but David flirted with them. Ted kept leaning across and whispering to him and David giggled and smiled. You could see he was enjoying himself tremendously. Christine knew they would ask her and David to go out with them after dinner and she began to be afraid. Suppose David got carried away by the excitement of it, the "fun," and went off somewhere with Ted, leaving her and Peter alone together? Peter had a red face and a black moustache and beard and a wart with black hairs growing out of it on his left cheek. She and David were eating steak and the waiter had brought them sharp pointed steak knives. She hadn't used hers. The steak was very tender. When no one was looking she slipped the steak knife into her bag.

Ted and Peter were still drinking coffee and brandies when David got up quite abruptly and said, "Coming?" to Christine.

"I suppose you've arranged to meet them later?" Christine said as soon as they were out of the dining room.

David looked at her. His scarlet-painted lips parted into a wide smile. He laughed.

"I turned them down."

"Did you *really?*"

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"I could tell you hated the idea. Besides, we want to be alone, don't we? I know I want to be alone with you."

She nearly shouted his name so that everyone could hear, the relief was so great. She controlled herself but she was trembling. "Of course I want to be alone with you," she said.

She put her arm in his. It wasn't uncommon, after all, for girls to walk along with linked arms. Men turned to look at David and one of them whistled. She knew it must be David the whistle was directed at because he looked so beautiful with his long golden hair and high-heeled red sandals. They walked along the sea front, along the little low promenade. It was too warm even at eight-thirty to wear a coat. There were a lot of people about but not crowds. The place was too select to attract crowds. They walked to the end of the pier. They had a drink in the Ship Inn and another in the Fishermen's Arms. A man tried to pick David up in the Fishermen's Arms but this time he was cold and distant.

"I'd like to put my arm round you," he said as they were walking back, "but I suppose that wouldn't do, though it is dark."

"Better not," said Christine. She said suddenly, "This has been the best evening of my life."

He looked at her. "You really mean that?"

She nodded. "Absolutely the best."

They came into the hotel. "I'm going to get them to send us up a couple of drinks. To my room. Is that okay?"

She sat on the bed. David went into the bathroom. To do his face, she thought, maybe to shave before he let the man with the drinks see him. There was a knock at the door and a waiter came in with a tray on which were two long glasses of something or other with fruit and leaves floating in it, two pink table napkins, two olives on sticks, and two peppermint creams wrapped up in green paper.

Christine tasted one of the drinks. She ate an olive. She opened her handbag and took out a mirror and a lipstick and painted her lips. David came out of the bathroom. He had taken off the golden wig and washed his face. He hadn't shaved. There was a pale stubble showing on his chin and cheeks. His legs and feet were bare and he was wearing a very masculine robe made of navy-blue toweling. She tried to hide her disappointment.

"You've changed," she said brightly.

He shrugged. "There are limits."

He raised his glass and she raised her glass and he said: "To us!"

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The beginnings of a feeling of panic came over her. Suddenly he was so evidently a man. She edged a little way along the mattress.

"I wish we had the whole weekend."

She nodded nervously. She was aware her body had started a faint trembling. He had noticed it, too. Sometimes before he had noticed how emotion made her tremble.

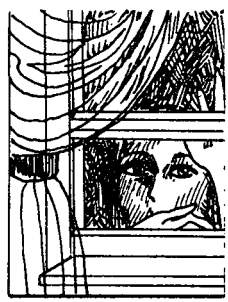
"Chris," he said.

She sat passive and afraid.

"I'm not really like a woman, Chris. I just play at that sometimes for fun. You know that, don't you?" The hand that touched her smelt of nail-varnish remover. There were hairs on the wrist she had never noticed before. "I'm falling in love with you," he said. "And you feel the same, don't you?"

She couldn't speak. He took her by the shoulders. He brought his mouth up to hers and put his arms round her and began kissing her. His skin felt abrasive and a smell as male as Graham's came off his body. She shook and shuddered. He pushed her down on the bed and his hands began undressing her, his mouth still on hers and his body heavy on top of her.

She felt behind her, put her hand into the open handbag, and pulled out the knife. Because she could feel his heart beating steadily against her right breast she knew where to stab and she stabbed again and again. The bright red heart's blood spurted over her clothes and the bed and the two peppermint creams on the tray.



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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

Jaysie turned to face him directly. "I hope whatever your plans are," she said firmly, "that they help you lose the vacant look in your own eyes. Because it is there, you know. You do have it, same as me."

Moss stared down into his circle of black coffee without replying. He could not deny it; he knew she was right. For weeks, months, years in prison, he had watched the look settle in his eyes, seen it daily in his prison-issue metal mirror: a dullness, a hollowness, an absence of anything hopeful, reflecting the knowledge that Friday would be like Thursday, Thursday like Wednesday, Wednesday like Tuesday, and all the days of his life were running together like the cells on a tier.

Clark Howard, whose new book, Brothers in Blood, *is receiving wide praise from readers and critics, has become a specialist on prisons and prisoners. His fiction and non-fiction about life both inside and outside the walls recognize everyman, caringly and unsparingly . . .*

NEW ORLEANS GETAWAY

by CLARK HOWARD

Moss Lemoyne arrived in New Orleans on the five-thirty bus from St. Francisville. He had been discharged from Angola, the state penitentiary, at eleven o'clock that morning. His face reflected the nine years he had served: a slight squint and a permanent tan from the hot sun of the fields; palms that were shiny from the wooden handle of his hoe; a habit of barely moving his lips when he spoke. He was forty-four but his life had stopped at thirty-five. He

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had lost nearly a decade, and inside him somewhere was a nagging urge to catch up.

Outside the bus station, a cab driver looked him up and down and said, "Taxi, bud?"

Moss shook his head. "I'll walk. Canal Street still in the same place?"

"Unless they've moved it since breakfast, it is."

Moss tucked his extra clothes and shaving gear, which were wrapped in a brown paper parcel, under one arm and walked the two blocks to Canal Street. It was bustling, just as he remembered it: people, cars, trucks, trolleys—everything and everybody moving almost in a frenzy. Life in the fast lane, Moss thought. It was a saying he had heard from some young kid, a new fish who had come into the walls a while back. Feeling suddenly dizzy, Moss stepped into a doorway and stood very still. He had skipped breakfast that morning: too excited about getting out; then the bus ride; now all this noise and movement on Canal Street. Better slow down, pard, he told himself. Get yourself to Coley's place and get something to eat.

Coley's Café was on a narrow, dingy little side street just a block from the river. Moss walked past it first and went down to the edge of the wharf to look at the Big Muddy—the Mississippi River. *The Beauregard,* a tourist paddle boat, was just coming in to anchor. Upriver, near the Pontchartrain Bridge, two rusty freighters were passing each other. Across the water was Gretna, the little town where Moss had grown up. He had three brothers and three sisters, and not one of them was still in Louisiana. They were spread out all over the country now, some of them he didn't even know where. Moss shook his head briefly. Where the hell does life go? he wondered.

He walked back to Coley's and went in. It was a seedy little joint, long and narrow like a boxcar, with all counter stools, no booths. The place smelled of grease and fried onions and cold hushpuppies, but to Moss it still smelled better than prison. There were only two customers at the counter, both bums nursing coffee. Coley was on a high stool next to the cash register, reading a racing form, picking his teeth with a toothpick. He had one leg, his right, stuck out straight alongside the stool. It was a wooden leg. Coley had lost it twenty years earlier after being shot in a bank robbery. He'd hidden out on a friend's farm, refusing to have a doctor called, and gangrene

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had set in. Coley was the only man on record to serve a full term for bank robbery in Leavenworth with a wooden leg.

"Hey, Coley," Moss said quietly, taking a stool next to him.

"Moss! Hey, man!" Coley's face turned on like a new bulb. He folded the scratch sheet, tossed the toothpick on the floor, and stuck out his hand. "You're looking good, boy, real good. Healthy."

"Home-grown vegetables," Moss said. Angola, the largest prison compound in the country, grew everything its prisoners ate. Some said it was the best prison food anyplace.

"They cut you loose this morning?" Coley asked. Moss nodded. "Ol' Burley still in charge of the dressing-out clothes?" Moss nodded again. Old Burley was a black man who had been in Angola for fifty-two years, since he was fourteen. He no longer believed there was an outside world—he thought it was all made up. "I bet he's seen a million guys get out," Coley said.

"At least," Moss agreed.

"You hungry?"

"Starving."

"Skipped breakfast, huh? Want anything special?"

"Anything'll do, with lots of milk."

Coley limped back to the kitchen and spoke to his fry cook. When he came back, he studied Moss Lemoyne for a moment, then asked, "What else you need?"

"A room for a couple of nights," Moss told him.

"Got one right upstairs. It ain't fancy but the rent's free."

"And I want to find Keene Summers," Moss said.

"Keene? Hell, that's easy. He's preaching now, you know."

"Preaching?"

"Yeah. You knew his daddy was a preacher. Well, when his daddy passed, as the blacks say, all them people in the old man's congregation got together and made Keene their preacher."

"But Keene's a burglar," Moss said, staring at Coley.

Coley shook his head. "Preacher."

A thin young girl with ruler-straight blonde hair entered the café, said "Hi, Mr. Coley," and went on back to the kitchen.

"Who's that?" Moss asked.

"My night girl. Runs the place from six 'til midnight."

"Little young for that kind of responsibility, ain't she?"

Coley shrugged. "Ain't much business at night. Just stragglers mostly. Coffee-and-pie types with noplace to go, killing time. She needed a job. Anyway, she says she's twenty."

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Moss grunted. "She's twenty, I'm honest."

Coley stared thoughtfully at him. "You could be, you know," he said quietly.

"Could be what? Honest?"

"Sure. It ain't so bad. Look at me, I'm doing okay. I been honest, or at least pretty near honest, for six years now."

"With you it's different. You went straight because—well—"

"Because of my leg, go ahead and say it. But you're wrong. I didn't turn honest because of my leg, I turned honest because of my head." Coley tapped his temple. "I got smart, Moss, I wised up. You could, too."

"Save it," Moss said without rancor. "I thought you said it was Keene doing the preaching. How about that room now? I'll take my supper with me."

"Sure."

Moss followed the limping man back to the kitchen where the cook had just set a large platter of steak, fries, and onion rings on the service counter.

"Put a cover over that and put it on a tray with a pitcher of milk," Coley told him. "Jaysie," he said to the blonde girl, "show my friend to that spare room upstairs."

Jaysie carried the supper tray and led Moss up a flight of inside back stairs to a windowless room with a slanted ceiling. In the room was a cot, a round wooden table with two straight chairs, a dresser with a cracked mirror, and a small fan.

"The fan's for when it gets too hot," Jaysie said.

"Glad you told me that," Moss replied dryly.

She blushed. "Bathroom's that door we passed at the top of the stairs." She put the tray on the table and started to leave.

"What kind of a name is Jaysie?" Moss asked.

"Oh, it's not a name, really," she said, pausing at the door. "What it really stands for is my initials: J.C. Janie Carol."

Moss walked over to her. "How old are you, Janie Carol?"

"I'm twenty," she replied, shifting her eyes. She again started to leave and Moss caught hold of her wrist.

"How old?"

"I said I was twenty."

He tightened his grip. "Try again."

"All right! I'm seventeen! Let go!"

Moss turned her loose and fixed her in a flat stare. "Coley is a

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good friend of mine. I don't want to see him get in any dutch over some runaway kid, understand me?"

"How'd you know I was a runaway?" she asked, almost indignantly.

"Lucky guess," Moss replied in the same dry tone he had used earlier. "Do you take my meaning about trouble for Coley?"

"I hear you," she said, half angry, half pouting. "But I wouldn't do nothing to hurt Mr. Coley. He's been good to me. 'Sides, I kind of feel sorry for him—I mean, him losing his leg in the war and all."

Moss managed to keep his expression straight. "He told you about that, did he?"

"Sure. Told me all about how he won all them medals and then lost his leg in Korea. He's a real hero."

"A real hero," Moss agreed.

After the girl left, Moss sat down and tried to control his laughter enough to eat.

The sign in front read: DIXIE EZEKIEL BAPTIST CHURCH—REV. KEENE SUMMERS, PASTOR. As Moss stood looking at it, a skinny black boy, ten or eleven, came up with a homemade wooden box slung over one shoulder.

"Shine, mister?"

Moss looked down at the brown prison brogans he'd been issued the previous day. Although new, they were state-made from reject-grade leather and were incapable of taking a shine. But the kid looked hungry.

"Sure," Moss said. He stepped over to a cypress tree in the grassless, worn-down church front yard and leaned against it. The black kid got the shine box under one foot and went to work.

Next door to the church was a playground as barren as the yard: torn limp volleyball net, bent basketball hoop, faded lines that had once been a shuffleboard court. "How come nobody's in the playground?" Moss asked the kid. The boy grunted scornfully.

"That playground ain't no good, man. Ain't got no 'quipment, so can't play no games. Need 'quipment to play games, you know."

The boy worked on Moss's shoes for twenty minutes, and when he finished they looked exactly like they had when he started. "Fi'ty cents," the boy said, holding out his hand. Moss gave him a dollar and the kid pretended he didn't have any change. Moss, knowing he was being worked, let him keep it all.

Inside the Dixie Ezekiel Church, Moss told a heavy-set black

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cleaning woman that he wanted to see Pastor Summers. She led him to a small office in the rear of the building.

"Hey, Keene," Moss said to the handsome black, ten years younger than himself, who sat behind a cluttered desk.

"Moss," Keene Summers said quietly, almost matter-of-factly, as if he might have been expecting him. He got up, came around the desk, and embraced Moss. "Moss, my friend, it's good to see you, really very good. You certainly look fit."

"Home-grown vegetables," Moss said. "But then you know that yourself."

"I certainly do," Keene said, laughing at a joke he knew to be on himself.

"I saw your name outside," said Moss. "Does your congregation know it used to have a number after it?"

"Yes, of course," Keene said. He returned to his chair behind the desk. "I grew up in this district, Moss. Everybody knows I took a fall for burglary when I was twenty-one. They all know I was sent to the adult reformatory, that I was a bad dude there and after one year got thrown behind the walls at Angola. And they know I did seven years there."

Moss raised his eyebrows. "They still let you be their pastor?"

"Not 'let,' Moss—they *insisted*. You see, my granddaddy founded Dixie Ezekiel in 1899. My daddy was pastor here for over thirty years. When Daddy passed, the church board came to me and asked me to take over. I had assisted Daddy for about five years, since I got out of prison. He had ordained me when he found out he had cancer. I tried to get out of it—Lord knows I didn't feel any calling to it. But the board, the entire congregation, insisted. They wanted me and they finally got me."

Moss smiled. "Nice work for a burglar."

Summers gazed at Moss but didn't reply to the comment. Moss let him gaze for a full minute, then rose and removed his coat. "Warm in here," he said. Sitting back down, he carefully, deliberately, rolled up his shirt sleeves. When he got the right one rolled up, it revealed on his forearm an ugly, bluish, puffy nine-inch scar that had obviously once been a terrible wound.

Keene Summers looked at the scar, smiled tolerantly, and said, "What is it you want, Moss?"

"I remember the day I got this," Moss said, running a fingertip along the scar. "We were all in the noon chow line. You had transferred in from the reformatory a week earlier. You were right ahead

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of me in line but we didn't know each other. All of a sudden, I heard the guy behind me whisper, 'Shank!' real scared like. I looked around and here's this big dude bearing down with a shank that had to be one of the best prison-made knives I ever seen—made out of melted toothbrush handles, molded about six inches long, both edges and the point sharpened like a razor on the cement floor. Beautiful. Anyway, I see this dude bearing down and I've got no idea he's the brother of a cat you had a run-in with in the reformatory. All's I know is he's getting ready to shove his Pepsodent shank into the side of your neck. I don't like to see nobody get it when they're not looking, so I threw up my arm to try to knock the shank out of his hand. Instead, I took the blade myself. Ripped my whole arm open. Took four months to heal." Moss flexed his bicep. "Never did get a hundred percent use of it back. Doc says about ninety percent. And a funny thing—it aches every time the weather's damp. Like arthritis."

Keene sat forward and put his hands together on the desk. "I know you probably saved my life, Moss. I've always been grateful to you for it. But I repeat, what do you want?"

"You said you owed me that day. You said anything, anytime. Remember?"

"I do."

"Well, this is the time, and here's the thing: I need a partner. For a vault job up in Baton Rouge."

"I'm a minister now, Moss," said Keene. "You can't be serious."

"I'm dead serious, man," Moss assured him. "Look, I think it's jake that you got your daddy's church and all; I'm glad you've got a good setup. But I *ain't* got one. I'm forty-four years old, man. I've done two stretches totaling fifteen years on the inside. I got no family, no trade, no prospects, and no future."

"But you've got something a lot of men *never* get, Moss—a fresh start." Keene's voice had turned eager. "Look, you don't need a vault job. Let me help you find a *real* job, an honest job. You're not too old to make a new start."

"Right. I'm going to make a new start, my friend, but it's not gonna be at the bottom of the ladder. I figure if I get me a nice stake, I can buy into some little business somewhere. I been keeping up on things by reading business magazines. I figure something like video-tape rentals or electronic games would have a good future. But I need that stake first." He fixed Keene in a flat gaze. "And I

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need a good partner. Somebody I can depend on. Somebody who owes me."

Keene Summers sighed heavily and sat back in his chair. His glance fell on Moss's scarred arm again. He imagined that scar along the side of his own face—which is where it would probably be if the knife hadn't killed him. Yeah, he owed Moss, all right. But a *vault job?* Did he owe him that much?

"Moss, I don't know if I'd be any good on a job any more," Keene said quietly. "I've been straight for so long that I—well, I'm not sure I'd hold up well."

"On this job you'd hold up," Moss assured him. "It's a hot car operation up in Baton Rouge. Keeps big money on hand to pay for its merchandise. The job's a snap. And your end will probably be twenty-five or thirty thousand. That kind of dough," he added pointedly, "would go a long way toward fixing up that playground of yours that don't seem to be attracting too many kids."

Keene smiled an almost embarrassed smile. "We *are* a poor church, Moss," he admitted. "But if I had twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars, I wouldn't put it into the playground. There's another, much more important project that would take priority over the playground. It's a day-care center that we've been trying to get going. We're so poor around here, and wages are so low in the black community in general, that in most families the wife has to work just to make ends meet. But she needs someplace reliable to leave her children—a place that won't charge her so much that it's not worth her while to work.

"That's where our church comes in: we're trying to set up a free day-care center. But it takes money—for cribs, youth beds, food, games, a place to put it all in, salaries for people to run it." Keene sighed almost resignedly. "You're right, Moss, twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars *would* go a long way." The young black man drummed the fingertips of one hand soundlessly on the desktop. After an awkward moment, he asked, "Where, uh—where did you get the vault job?"

"Contracted it," Moss repled. "From Henry Palmetto."

Keene's eyebrows raised and an immediate look of interest spread over his face—as Moss had known it would. Henry Palmetto was a master planner of burglaries, considered to be one of the best casemen in the business. Once an intimate of Willie Sutton, he was reputed to have set up more than a hundred of the most successful burglaries in the country, and he had never been caught for any of

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them. He was in prison today only because of his involvement with an unfaithful woman he had been obliged to kill. From his cell where he was serving life, he continued to set up burglaries of all sizes for a percentage of the take.

"Tell me about the job," Keene said.

"Like I mentioned," said Moss, "it's a front for a hot-car ring up in Baton Rouge. From the outside it looks like an ordinary used-car lot—they even keep a few dozen legitimate-sale cars just to make it look good. And they actually sell some of them. But the big money is in stolen cars. They specialize in American-made luxury stuff—Coupe de Villes, Continentals, Rivieras, Toronados. The cars are grabbed in other states, Louisiana plates put on them, and driven back to Baton Rouge.

"The car lot has a garage and paint shop behind it. Six hours after they get a hot car, they have it completely painted a new color, different seats in it, a new serial-number burned into the engine block, and a forged Louisiana title and registration fixed up for it. Then they drive them over to Texas, run them across the border into Mexico, and sell them for six or eight grand apiece. They handle a dozen cars a week and take in seventy to ninety thousand. Palmetto says they've been operating without a hitch for a long time and never been touched. They're fat, lazy, and ripe."

"What's the layout?" Keene asked.

"The car-lot office is a one-story blockwall building in the middle of the lot. Tar-and-asbestos roof. Alarm system is a light-and-buzzer deal wired to the doors and windows only; it's connected to a security firm downtown. The vault is a Warnecke triple-plate, triple-tumbler model; it'll peel or burn, whatever. There's a night watchman on the premises from the time the lot closes until it gets light the next morning. This time of year he leaves about six A.M. Palmetto says the best time to do it is between then and nine in the morning when they open. The best day is Monday, because the weekend car-sales money will be there too."

"What's Palmetto's end?"

"Fifteen percent of what's in the vault. We pay our own expenses."

Keene Summers rose and walked to the one window. Standing with his hands clasped behind his back, he gazed out at the run-down, deserted playground, wondering where all the kids were who should have been playing there. Beyond the playground, he studied a shabby, abandoned house that had been deeded to Dixie Ezekiel Church, and which he hoped could be refurbished into a day-care

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center. There was so much to be done, he mused, and so little time, so little money. This vault job almost seemed like a gift from heaven—a gift which would permit him to free himself of his obligation to Moss Lemoyne, while at the same time securing enough money to get started on the day-care center. And it wouldn't be like he was stealing from anyone that mattered. After all, what was the place but a front for a hot-car operation. Was stealing from people who steal really stealing? Couldn't one suppose that the Savior would forgive that kind of transgression?

Keene smiled at his own reflection in the window. Come on, boy, you know better than that, he chided himself. Go in on the vault job if you want to, but don't try to hustle the Lord for a partner. Maybe God will understand and maybe He won't: you'll never know until Judgment Day. Meanwhile, Keene concluded his thoughts, we need the day-care center *now*.

Keene turned to Moss again. "I'll provide the car, the tarp, and the hand tools. You get the drill and the accessories. I think a Walsh 200-series drill ought to do it. Better get a dozen bits just in case. My Sunday-night service concludes at nine; we'll leave for Baton Rouge right after." He put his hand out to Moss. "Deal?"

"Deal," said Moss, shaking hands.

That night, in his room above the café, Jaysie brought him a tray with his supper on it. "Can I ask you a question?" she said as he sat down to eat.

"I guess."

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to be your daddy and then some," he replied.

"No, I mean it. How old are you, really?"

"Forty-four going on ninety. Don't you have work to do downstairs?"

"I'm on my break," she announced loftily. " 'Sides, there hasn't been a customer in the place for two hours. It's pouring rain out—if you had a window you'd know that. Can I sit down?"

"No."

Moss was in his undershirt and Jaysie saw his scarred arm. "Lordy, where'd you get that?" she asked in wonder. It was the worst scar she had ever seen.

"Korean War," said Moss. "I was in the same outfit Coley was in when he lost his leg. Will you beat it now and let me eat supper in peace?"

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"If you'll tell me one thing first, I'll go," she said. "How'd you know so quick I was a runaway?"

Moss paused in his eating and looked steadily at her. Her pencil-thin body was almost as straight as her ironed blonde hair: she had practically no hips, no bust. Her collarbone stuck out above the scoop of her blouse, and her shoulderblades stuck out under it in back. Her arms looked too skinny to do anything heavy, yet Moss knew she was strong; he knew it from when he had grabbed her wrist that first day. He suspected that her legs, which were shapely and her best physical attribute, were also strong.

"Your eyes," he said in answer to her question. "There's a vacant, hollow look in them that says tomorrow's going to be exactly the same as today. All runaways have that look. And all junkies. And all convicts. All the losers."

"Well, *I'm* not a loser," she said defiantly. She met his direct eyes and immediately looked down. "At least not a permanent loser. I'll make it someday."

"Sure you will," Moss said without enthusiasm. "Someday." He resumed eating.

Jaysie stood looking at him for a long moment, watching him eat, watching him deliberately keep his eyes averted, purposely not looking at her anymore. Finally she turned and left him to the solitude of the lonely little room.

After supper, Moss went out again. He took a bus over to an area behind the St. Louis Cemetery, where a row of small garages and repair shops occupied the limited space beneath an elevated highway. The place he went in was called Claude's Welding Shop. Claude was a rotund little man with constantly drooping eyelids that made him look sleepy or on something, Moss never could figure out which. From Claude, Moss bought, on credit, the Walsh 200-series drill he needed, and ten bits, which was all Claude had on hand. He also picked up two pairs of welding goggles to protect their eyes against flying slivers of metal, two pairs of moleskin gloves to absorb the sweat from their hands when they were drilling, and two pairs of engineer's coveralls to keep the steel dust off their street clothes. Claude packed everything neatly into a black-canvas bag.

"You'll get your money Monday afternoon," Moss told the sleepy-eyed little welder.

"Yeah, okay, fine," said Claude, who reiterated everything he said.

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"Listen, I can order them two extra bits for you. I mean, if you want a dozen, I can get two more. I can order 'em for you, you know?"

"Ten will do," Moss said. "See you Monday."

"So long. Goodbye. See you," said Claude.

When Moss got back to the café, Coley was there with a tall redhead wearing spike heels and a coral pantsuit. Coley himself had on a white-linen suit and open-collar navy shirt. When he saw Moss come in with the canvas bag, he moved over to intercept him at the back stairs.

"Been to see Claude, huh?" Coley said.

Moss nodded. "Who's the redhead?"

"Estelle Dumond. She dances down at the Burgundy Club; a specialty number. This is her night off. We been making it together for about a year now." He tapped his wooden leg. "She likes me 'cause I never take her dancing. She hates dancing. Like people who work in candy factories, you know. They never eat candy." Coley glanced down at the bag. "So everything's set, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Jeez, I wish I could talk you out of it, Mossy. I'd hate to see you fall and go back inside. You'd be old and gray time you got out again."

"A man's got to play it the only way he knows how, Coley. You understand that."

"I *used* to understand that," Coley said emphatically. "Not no more. Now I know a guy can break the mold if he wants to bad enough. I done it. Keene done it. You can do it too. Listen, I'll tell you what I'll do. Take that bag back to Claude and tell him you changed your mind. Then come to work for me. I need a new fry cook, for nights, to work with Jaysie. The guy I got is going to Miami to try to get back together with his ex-wife. Work for me a while, settle down, show me your head's on right, and then we'll sit down and talk about that little business of your own that you want: video tapes or games or whatever."

Moss's eyes narrowed knowingly. "Been talking to Keene, have you?"

Coley shrugged. "What's the diff? We're all friends, ain't we? Now getting back to this little business of yours, if the idea looks good, I'll borrow the dough and stake you. What do you say?"

Moss looked down at the floor so that Coley wouldn't see how touched he was by the offer. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, Coley. Really. But I've got to go my own way."

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The redhead called to Coley from the front door. "Coley, honey, we're going to be late if you don't come on."

"Right there," Coley called back. "We're taking the supper cruise on *The Beauregard,*" he explained to Moss. "Just like a couple of square tourists." For a moment then, the two men stood in awkward silence, both looking down at the floor. Finally Coley grinned and slapped him on the back. "Sure, I understand. Good luck, pal."

"Thanks," Moss said.

The café was closed Sunday night when Moss got ready to go meet Keene, so when he came downstairs he was surprised to find Jaysie sitting at the counter with an open book and a cup of coffee in front of her.

"I thought this was your night off," he said, putting the canvas bag on the floor and drawing a cup of coffee for himself.

"It is. But I like to study here 'cause it's quiet. The rooming house where I live is full of jazz musicians. They're always practicing. Makes it hard to concentrate."

Moss turned the book up to see its title. *"Basic English,"* he read. "Where you studying that?"

"At Foster Continuation School. That's a school for people who never finished high school. I'm taking spelling and typing, too. I don't intend to have that vacant look, as you call it, in my eyes forever. All of *my* tomorrows are *not* going to be the same."

"Good for you," Moss said.

His voice had such a neutral tone that Jaysie was not sure whether he meant it or if he was just being sarcastic again. She glanced down at the canvas bag. "You leaving?"

"Not tonight. But I will be soon. Probably tomorrow or the next day."

"Oh." She looked away.

Moss frowned. "You sound disappointed."

She shrugged. "It's just that Mr. Coley said that he was going to try to get you to be his night fry cook for a while. I guess you turned him down."

"Yeah, I did." Moss could not understand why he suddenly felt self-conscious. "I, uh, I've got other plans."

Jaysie turned to face him directly. "I hope whatever they are," she said firmly, "that they help *you* lose the vacant look in your own eyes. Because it is there, you know. You do have it, same as me."

Moss stared down into his circle of black coffee without replying.

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He could not deny it; he knew she was right. For weeks, months, years in prison, he had watched the look settle in his eyes, seen it daily in his prison-issue metal mirror: a dullness, a hollowness, an absence of anything hopeful, reflecting the knowledge that Friday would be like Thursday, Thursday like Wednesday, Wednesday like Tuesday, and all the days of his life were running together like the cells on a tier: an endless line, each the same as the one after it and the one before it.

He turned to Jaysie with a slight, sad smile. "You're right, kid. I'm a loser, too."

"Then why don't you do like I'm doing?" she asked urgently. "Try to get out of your rut. Try to make things better for yourself." She put a hand on his arm. "Take the job Mr. Coley offered you. Please, Moss."

It was the first time she had called him by name. The first time he had heard any female voice speak his name in over nine years. For some reason it moved him. But not enough. He patted the hand on his arm. "I am going to try, Jaysie. But in my own way." He glanced up at a Dr. Pepper clock on the wall. "I've got to go."

Jaysie suddenly leaned forward and kissed him briefly on the lips. "I sometimes study very late," she said softly.

"Sorry," Moss said, "but I'll be out all night."

At the Dixie Ezekiel Baptist Church, Moss entered by the back door and waited in Keene's office. It was warm and the windows were open. Moss could hear Keene preaching at the Sunday-night meeting: hear his voice loud and clear as he praised Jesus and challenged Satan, shouted the goodness of eternal salvation and warned of the tortures of eternal damnation, as he called for sinners to come forward and be saved, pleaded, cajoled, teased, and prodded them into coming forward to accept Jesus Christ as their savior. Keene's voice was powerful, moving, tenacious; it loomed above the "Amens" and "Hallelujahs" and "Yes, Brothers" that mingled in with his fervent message.

When it was over, the organ began to play and all the voices merged as one to sing "Just a Closer Walk with Thee." It was the first song Moss had ever learned as a kid, growing up across the river in Gretna. The words came back to him now and he closed his eyes and sang them softly to himself:

"Through this life of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?

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Who for me my burden bears?
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee."

The old gospel song swept a rush of memories through Moss's head. He saw himself again as a little white boy stowing away on the ferry to cross over to New Orleans, there to wander the levees with other little boys, some white, some colored, listening to the Creole jazz bands play on street corners, begging food at the kitchen doors of the great houses on Royal Street, watching the fancy ladies from the Quarter strut along Bourbon Street with the pride of princesses.

Life had been simple then. So very simple.

Moss was so caught up in his own thoughts that he didn't hear the music and praying end, didn't know the Sunday-night service was over until Keene came in and said, "Hey, Moss."

He opened his eyes then, the past back where it belonged. "Hey, Keene."

"Everything set?"

"Set," Moss confirmed.

Moss watched Keene empty his pockets and wallet of everything that could identify him. Like Moss, he would carry nothing in his pockets but a little money and the business card of a good lawyer. As Keene took things out of his wallet, Moss noticed a photo of a pretty young woman with an Afro, and a little girl with her hair braided in corn rows.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"My wife and daughter," Keene said.

Moss stared incredulously at him. "I didn't know you had a family."

"Sure. Little girl's four."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"What for? Would it have made any difference to you? I still owe you, Moss, whether I have a family or not."

"Yeah, but—"

"But nothing, man. Come on, let's hit the road."

They took three hours to drive to Baton Rouge, taking the back roads along the river, staying off the interstate with its fast traffic and state-police cars. They drove through little river settlements like Reserve, Romeville, Dutchtown, and Sunshine; smelled the smoky, dusky outdoor fires that the bayou people built nightly, summer and winter; smelled fish frying an hour after being pulled out

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of the Big Muddy; smelled the willows, the riverbanks, the okra and crawfish and greens being steamed for Cajun gumbo. And everywhere along the road there was music, all lonely, all soulful: a mournful harmonic, a blue guitar, a slow, lazy Jew's harp.

"Nothing ever changes down here, does it?" Moss said, more a statement than a question.

"Not hardly," Keene replied quietly.

They drove in silence for most of the trip, and got into Baton Rouge a little after midnight. Driving past the used-car lot, they saw a light inside where the night watchman was probably sitting.

"What time's daylight, you reckon?" Keene asked.

"Five forty-two," Moss said. "I called the weather bureau long-distance to find out."

They found an all-night chili joint and killed two hours there, eating a late supper, reading a discarded Sunday paper. Then they pulled onto a Holiday Inn lot, parked the car in a back corner, and slumped down in the seat to doze for a couple of hours.

At five-fifteen, they were again cruising the street that the used-car lot was on. They watched daylight come slowly, dark to gray to light. The night watchman left at ten minutes to six. They waited until six to make sure he wouldn't pull the old trick of going around the block a couple of times. Then they parked behind the building, stood on top of the car, and scrambled onto the roof. Moss carried the canvas bag containing the drill, bits, and clothing; Keene handled the hand tools and the square-folded tarpaulin with its rope and hardware.

It took them sixteen minutes to punch a hole in the roof and drop down into the office. Twelve minutes to twist screwhooks into facing walls and lash up the tarp to seal off their light and noise from the front. Four minutes to lay out their drill and bits, get into their coveralls, don gloves and goggles.

Then they were ready to drill. They took turns, one drilling while one watched the street. The drilling was hard, hot work. Sweat poured down their necks, laced their forearms, spread in a circle in the small of their backs. The Warnecke vault was one tough baby: steel on top of steel on top of steel. The first drill bit broke in four minutes, less than an eighth of an inch into the outer plate. The second one broke five minutes later; the third and fourth less than ten minutes after that. By the time they were halfway through the middle plate, they had broken three more. A total of seven dead bits.

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"Good thing we got a dozen," Keene said, wiping the sweat from his face. "We'll probably need every one of them."

Taking the drill for his turn, Moss said nothing to Keene about having only ten bits. During his turn on the drill, he was very careful to keep the drill-nose as level-straight as possible.

Keene took the drill again when black slivers told them they had reached the bottom plate. Immediately he broke another bit biting into it.

"Take it easy, will you?" Moss said with an edge. "Slow down a little."

"I want to get out of here, my friend," Keene said. "Besides, we've got four bits left. No bottom plate made can stand up to four Walsh bits."

Halfway through the bottom plate, Keene broke their ninth bit.

"I'll take it now," Moss said. Wetting his lips, he slugged the last bit into the drill, took a deep breath, and started to drill. He had a quarter of an inch of steel to get through. If he didn't make it, the job would go down the drain. He drilled slowly, carefully, for five minutes. Sweat, both from the effort and the tension, drenched his torso.

"Take a break, man," Keene said after five minutes. "Let me spell you again."

"I'm okay," Moss said. "Watch the street."

Keene went back to the edge of the tarp and resumed his scrutiny of the street. Several minutes later, Moss came over to him, shoulders slumped, but a look of relief in his eyes.

"We're through the bottom plate. Go punch the lock."

"All *right!*" Keene said happily.

They climbed back out through the hole in the roof at twenty past eight with the canvas bag packed with sheafs of currency. The goggles, coveralls, tarp, and miscellaneous tools were left behind; only the drill, which had a traceable serial number, was brought back out. After they got in the car, they stripped off the moleskin gloves and tossed them on the ground next to the building.

"We've got forty, maybe forty-five minutes to get across the St. Gabriel bridge before the alarm's sounded and roadblocks go up," Moss said.

"You think they'll blow the whistle?" Keene asked.

"Sure they will. All they have to say is that we hit them for the

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week's car-sales receipts. They'll probably call in the law just to get us caught. Then take care of us themselves later."

As they headed back south by way of the same bayou roads, Moss unzipped the canvas bag, tossed the drill on the back seat, and began counting their take. When he finished, he said, "Not as much as I hoped for. Fifty-seven thousand even." He fell silent for a moment as he figured the shares. "That's a little over eighty-five hundred for Palmetto, and about twenty-four thousand apiece for you and me."

"That's my day-care center," said Keene. "I'm satisfied, man. You?"

"Yeah," said Moss. "Yeah, I'm cool." Suddenly he frowned. "What's that up ahead?"

A white man in overalls was in the middle of the narrow blacktop road, frantically flagging them down. Next to the road, an old pickup truck was overturned in a culvert.

"Go around him," Moss said.

"Maybe somebody's hurt, Moss."

"*We'll* be hurt if we don't get over the St. Gabriel bridge by nine o'clock. Go around him."

Keene Summers flicked his eyes from the frantic man to the overturned truck. Then he saw a child lying alongside the culvert. "Somebody's hurt, Moss. It's a kid. I'm stopping."

"Are you crazy!" Moss snapped, but it was too late: Keene was already grinding the car to a halt at the edge of the culvert.

"Can y'all help me?" the man pleaded as he ran up to them. "My little girl's hurt and my little boy's stuck inside the truck!"

"What happened?" asked Keene, leaping out. Cursing under his breath, Moss jumped out with him.

"Blew a tire," said the farmer.

"See about the girl, Moss," Keene said. "I'll try to get the boy out."

"I smell gasoline," Moss warned.

"Yeah, so do I."

Keene slid into the culvert next to the overturned truck. Through the windshield he saw a young boy lying wedged up against one door. The door was locked but the window was down several inches. "Come help me!" Keene shouted to the farmer. Keene had begun to sweat with fear; the frightening odor of gasoline was almost overpowering.

The farmer slid down beside him. With four hands exerting pressure, they managed to force the window down far enough for Keene

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to reach in and unlocked the door. They got the unconscious boy out and scrambled back up the embankment.

"How's the girl?" Keene asked.

"I think she's got a broken arm," Moss said, kneeling, helping the tearful child sit up.

Keene turned to the farmer. "Where's the nearest hospital?"

"Over by the St. Gabriel bridge."

"Which side?" Moss asked with sudden interest.

"This side," said the farmer.

"Come on, Moss," Keene said firmly. "These kids need attention."

They put the farmer and his little boy in the back seat, Moss cradled the little girl on his lap, and Keene drove. It was twenty miles to the outskirts of St. Gabriel, where the hospital was located. And the bridge. As they drove up to the hospital emergency entrance, Moss could see that there was as yet no roadblock on the bridge. "Let's make this fast," he said urgently to Keene. The black man threw him an irritated glance which he ignored.

Keene took the boy from his father and hurried into the emergency room, with Moss carrying the sobbing girl right behind him. The trembling father of the children shouted for a doctor. It took a couple of minutes for nurses and attendants to get each of the children into an examining room. Moss saw a clock as he was being shown where to take the girl. It was ten before nine. We still got an edge, he thought tightly.

When the two children were finally in medical hands, Moss took Keene firmly by the arm. "That's it, man. That's all we can do. Now let's split."

They hurried back to where they had left the car. But as soon as they got outside the door, they saw that they were too late. A roadblock of two radio cars had sealed off the approach to the bridge. And a tall, uniformed policeman was walking around their car, looking it over. When they got close enough to him, they saw that his badge was inscribed: SHERIFF—ST. GABRIEL TOWNSHIP.

"This your car?" he asked, one hand on his pistol butt, his eyes shifting back and forth between them.

"Yessir, it is," Keene said, trying to keep the guilt out of his voice.

Moss said nothing. He felt ill: physically sick to his stomach. Dread thoughts of Angola flooded his head: the backbreaking field work, the lumpy mattresses, the smells and noise of hundreds of men, the long nights. He suddenly knew that he would rather die than go back to prison.

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"What's that there drill on the back seat for?" the sheriff asked.

"We're steel workers," Keene replied. "Going down to New Orleans looking for work."

The sheriff's expression was inscrutable. "What's in the canvas bag on the front floorboard?" he asked.

Keene shrugged. "Just clothes, sir. Personal stuff."

"Suppose you open it and show me."

Moss hung his head and his shoulders slumped. Coley's words screamed inside his head: *You'll be old and gray before they let you out again.* He looked over at the sheriff's hand still on the pistol butt. If I run, he'll put one right in my back, Moss thought.

"Open the bag," the sheriff said again. Keene sighed resignedly and reached in the car for the bag. Just then, the father of the two injured children came out.

"My kids are gonna be all right," he said happily to Keene and Moss. Then he saw the sheriff. "Hey, Jesse," he greeted him.

"What are you doing here, Alvin?" the sheriff asked.

Alvin told him: about the blowout, the rescue of the boy, driving both children to the hospital, carrying them inside. "Weren't for these two fellers, we might have lost Joey. He's got a punctured lung and a concussion. Doc says he could've died of shock we didn't get him here quick as we did." He turned to Keene and Moss. "Fellers, this here's my brother Jesse. He's the sheriff hereabouts. I swear I don't know how in the world to thank you boys for what you done."

"That's okay," Moss said, suddenly feeling all right again. "Your brother the sheriff knows how. Don't you, Sheriff?"

The sheriff nodded knowingly at Moss. "I reckon I do, all right."

"We was just telling him how we're in a hurry to be on our way to New Orleans to look for work. Weren't we, Sheriff?"

"That's a fact," the sheriff said. He moved his hand away from his gun. "Get in your car, boys. I'll ride with you and see you past the roadblock. Alvin, I'll be back directly to see the kids."

Half an hour later, Keene and Moss were well on their way home. Neither of them was making much conversation; it was taking them a while to get over the fright and nausea of almost being caught. But as they were driving past the New Orleans city limit, Moss felt the need to purge his conscience.

"You know that day I took the shank in my arm?" he said quietly. "I wasn't trying to keep that dude from sticking you. I thought he was coming for *me*. I had him confused with another one of those

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heavy dudes that I had a run-in with over some smokes that was owed me. Truth is, I hustled you into this job, Keene. You never really owed me nothing."

Keene swallowed dryly and did not say anything. He kept his anger in check, thinking: forgive and forget, it's all done with. He had the money to start the day-care center now. The Lord moved in mysterious ways.

When they reached the Dixie Ezekiel Church, Moss carried the canvas bag in and opened it on Keene's desk. He counted out eighty-five hundred dollars.

"This is Palmetto's share—it goes to his lawyer. I want you to divide the rest in half. Your half you can start your day-care center with or whatever you want to do. My half I want you to use to fix up that playground out there. I want it to look brand new again. And I want all new equipment bought—you can't play games without equipment, you know." Moss went to the door to leave. "If you want me for anything, I'll be working over at Coley's. As a fry cook."

Keene Summers was staring at his friend in disbelief. Moss paused at the door and bobbed his chin at the bag of money.

"This makes us even. It squares me for hustling you into the job, right?"

Keene smiled. "Right."

Moss winked and left the church. Outside, he ran into the little black boy with the shoeshine box.

"Hey, kid, good news," Moss told him. "The preacher is gonna fix up the playground. He's ordering all new equipment, too."

The boy eyed Moss suspiciously. "You jiving me?"

"Hey, would I lie? Honest man like me?" Moss rubbed the boy's head and hurried off down the street.

On his way to the café, he began whistling "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," all the while wondering how long it would be until Jaysie turned eighteen.

"Q"

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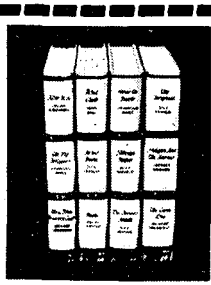

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DETECTIVERSE

THE BAR OF GOLD

by WILLIAM C. THOMAS

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The Bar of Gold by name.
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Through a dirty, blackened door,
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He's never known before.
The pungent reek of opium smoke
Assails the visitor's senses—
The opium has her way with him
And lowers his defenses.
He lies upon a filthy berth
And swallows in her fumes,
While silently a Lascar sneaks
Down from the upper rooms.
A garrote steals around the throat
That breathes there undefended,
The knotted ends are drawn together—
The visitor's life is ended.
The corpse is robbed of watch and wallet,
Then bundled in a sack.
It's dropped into the Thames
Through a trap door in the back.
If you should visit London Town,
That famous city of old,
Beware the vile establishment
They call the Bar of Gold.

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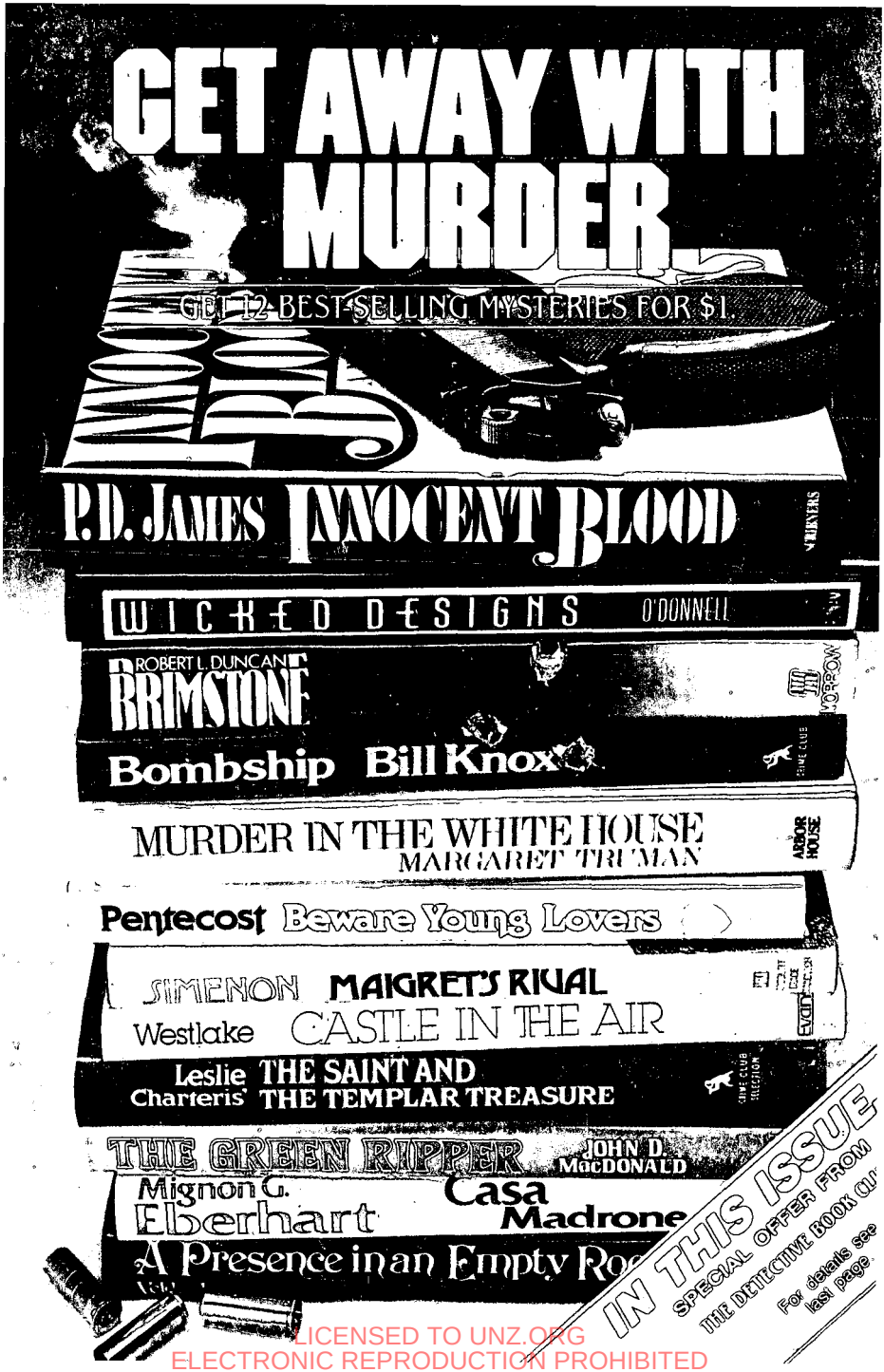
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